



**Report for: PERFORMANCE AND
FINANCE SUB-
COMMITTEE**

Date of Meeting: 18 July 2023

Subject: Children's Services Complaints &
Feedback Annual Report 2022/23

Responsible Officer: Senel Arkut, Corporate Director
People Services

Exempt: No

Wards affected: All

Enclosures: Children's Services Complaints &
Feedback Annual Report 2022/23

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report provides an overview of the Council's performance on Children's Services complaints and feedback activity between the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

Recommendations:

The Sub-Committee is requested to note the report. The report is for information purposes only.

Section 2 – Executive Summary

This report provides a summary of complaints and feedback for Harrow Children's Services from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

1. Background

1.1. This report provides a summary of the complaints and feedback from the Children's Services Annual complaints and feedback report covering the period 1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023, included in Appendix 1.

1.2. Children's social care complaints are handled in line with the Children Act 1989 Regulations 2006 and Getting the Best from Complaints guidance 2006. There is a legal requirement for all local authorities to have a complaint process in place in accordance with these regulations, The Children and Adoption Act 2002 and Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and related guidance. The statutory complaints procedure is designed to ensure the needs of the child are the heart of the process.

1.3. The three stages of the Children's statutory complaints procedure are as follows:

Stage 1 - Local Resolution stage (10 - 20 working days)

Stage 2 - Independent investigation stage (25 – 65 working days)

Stage 3 - Independent Review Panel (30 working days)

1.4. Non-social care complaints, concerning Education and Special Educational needs, complaints are investigated in line with the Council's Corporate complaints procedure, which comprises two stages as follows:

Stage 1- Local Resolution (15 working days)

Stage 2 - Review (20 working days)

1.5. The final stage for both corporate and statutory children's complaints, is escalation to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman.

1.6. Complaints about schools are managed within each school's own complaints procedure. Appeals for school places are considered under the School Appeal Process and disputes such as those relating to the Education, Health and Care plans are considered through appeals to the Statutory Appeals tribunal.

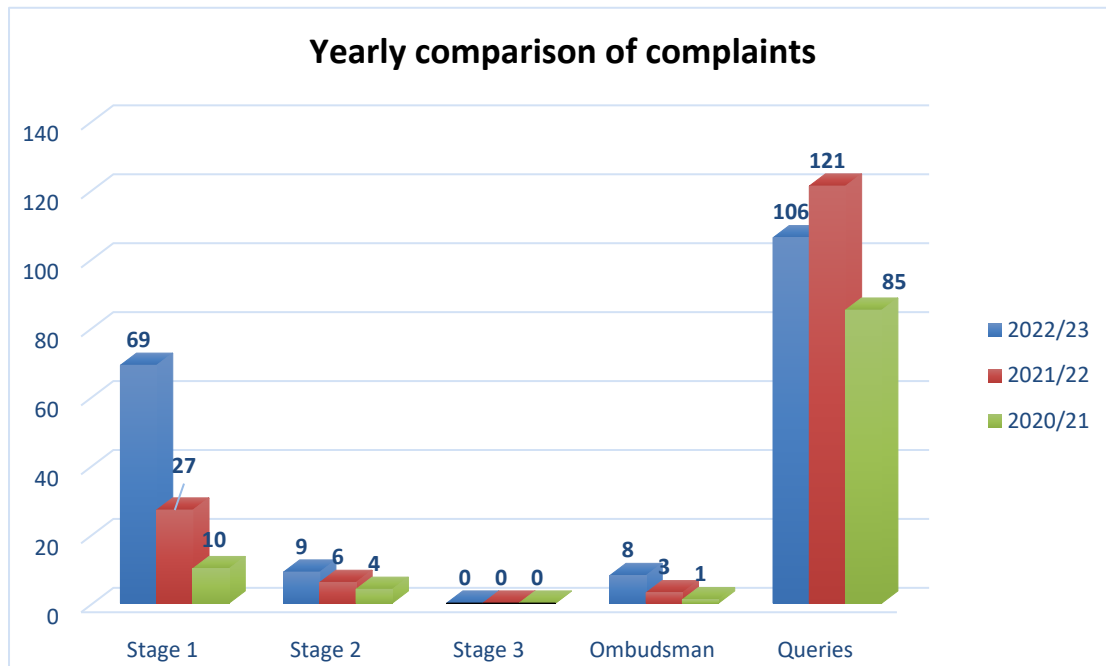
2. Summary of Key Findings

2.1. During 2022/23, Children's Services received a total of 309 representations, as compared to 246 in 2021/22 and 177 during 2020/21.

2.2. Between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, a summary of the key activity:

- A total of 69 stage 1 complaints received, 9 complaints escalated to stage 2 complaints and 0 stage 3 panel reviews
- The Ombudsman made investigation decisions on four complaints

- Additionally, there were 45 Member and 51 MP enquiries
- The service recorded 64 compliments
- There were 106 queries addressed outside the formal complaint process



2.3. In total 26 of the 69 stage 1 complaints related to Education and SENAR services, concerning issues related to the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), school transport and school provision. These complaints were investigated in accordance with the Council's corporate complaints procedure

2.4. There were 43 complaints related to Children's social care services under the statutory complaint procedure

2.5. A breakdown of the complaints by service team is detailed on page 8 of the Children's Services annual report and shows that the Special Educational Needs and Reviews (SENARS) and Child in Need (CIN) teams reported the highest number of complaints.

2.6. For SEN and Education, the complaints have concerned delays with the EHCP process with naming a school and related provision, school placements, requests for educational support and actions taken regarding home elected children and school transport.

2.7. The complaints linked to the CIN service challenged the level of support provided or children's services intervention in their family life. Social work assessments and reports raised complaints where a parent was unhappy with information and not in agreement with the facts or professional opinions recorded about them and related events.

2.8. Complaint response times improved by 14% during 2022/23, with 63% of stage 1 complaints responded on time, as compared to 55% in the previous year.

2.9. In total, 56 stage 1 complaints received a response during 2022/23, which included complaints that were open at the end of previous reporting year 2021/22.

2.10. As detailed on page 12 Chart 6 of the annual report, 68% of the completed complaints were not upheld, 16% were upheld and 16% were partially upheld.

2.11. Complaints that were upheld or partially upheld related to operational issues such as delays in action/decision making and correspondence, inadequate communication and the quality of case recording. The learning section provides details of the actions taken forward for service improvement.

2.12. Complaints regarding Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan delays impacting statutory timescales were mostly upheld. Delays in naming a school place for a child or amending/finalising an EHC plan were largely attributable to the increase in caseloads and staffing capacity pressures

2.13. Six complaints were escalated to stage 2 and three of the complaints had completed investigations. The number of complaints being escalated to stage 2 remains low as detailed in Tables 5 and 6 on page 14 of the annual report. These low numbers reflect the considerable time and effort that is taken to try to resolve issues at stage 1.

2.14. One social care stage 2 complaint was upheld in relation to the quality of contact and communication with the parent. Two complaints were not upheld regarding the level of social care support /intervention and welfare procedure on school transport. Three stage 2 social care complaints were still in progress.

2.15. The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman considered eight Children's Services complaints during this reporting period. Three complaints were not investigated as being premature or not within the Ombudsman's jurisdiction. Below is a summary of the two complaints with completed investigations.

Service	Complaint	Outcome	Remedy
SENARS	Delay in the EHCP process, not securing a school place	Fault (maladministration and injustice)	Apology Financial redress Learning
School Admissions	The appeal process was flawed	No fault identified in the process of handing the appeal.	Not applicable

2.16. Learning identified and implemented as a result of a complaint is summarised:

- The importance of ensuring young care leavers are consulted in formulating and updating their Pathway plan.

- To complete annual reviews and Education, Health and Care plans in a timely manner, in line with the statutory requirements
- To inform a parent within six weeks of the transfer of the Education, Health and Care plan when the Council intends to complete a review and when it intends to conduct a review of the child's needs
- Accurate and timely case recording to document all communications between the worker and families.
- Ensuring families are kept updated and informed to avoid unnecessary delay and distress
- Improving timeliness of actions and responses, to avoid unnecessary delay or outside legal requirements
- Clear communication, to explain processes and decisions and in a timely way
- Social workers to review their direct work practice, to ensure that lessons are learnt going forward.

2.17. The Directorate recorded 51 MP enquiries and 45 Member enquiries during 2022-23. School admission places received the most enquiries from MPs and Members during 2022/23, with parents concerned to ensure their child received their preferred school.

2.18. Three quarters (77%) of MP enquiries were responded in 5 –10 working days and 88% Member enquiries were responded within 5-10 working days by the final quarter period of 2022/23.

2.19. Children's services recorded 21 compliments for the reporting year. Some examples of the positive feedback are detailed below.

2.20. Thank you for your email. I hope your keeping well, I would like to thank you for all the help and indeed support you have given to myself and the boys, going that extra mile to help us was always what made you stand out. The world would be a much better place if there were more people like you, you are a true credit to your profession. It has been a real pleasure to have worked with you. God bless you. **Fostering and Permanence Team**

2.21. Thank you for all the great work you do for deaf children and young people. **Children's Sensory Team**

2.22. There's no word that I can find truly in order to appreciate your great efforts for all of us and the community. From bottom of our heart, we would like to say Thank you so much. **School Admission Team**

2.23. Going forward in 2023/24, the complaints team will continue to ensure the operation of the complaint procedures is robust and in line with the statutory requirements and that it effectively monitors performance. The effectiveness of the complaint procedures depends on the wider organisational culture with a key focus on resolving issues and improving outcomes.

2.24. Improving complaint and Member/MP response times will be an ongoing priority with support from senior staff. The service target has been set to ensure 75% of complaints are responded on time.

2.25. The complaints team will continue to work with all service teams to identify and address areas of learning from complaints for service improvement.

2.26. Training and refresher sessions will be ongoing for Managers and their teams on effective complaints handling and ensuring quality complaint responses and handling complex cases.

Legal Implications

There are no specific budget issues associated with this report

Financial Implications

There are no specific budget issues associated with this report. All compensation payments are agreed by Service Managers and are funded within existing budgets.

Risk Management Implications

Risks included on directorate risk register? **No**

Separate risk register in place? **No**

Equalities implications / Public Sector Equality Duty

Not applicable

Council Priorities

1. **A council that puts residents first**
2. **A borough that is clean and safe**
3. **A place where those in need are supported**

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

The report did not require Financial or Legal clearance.

Chief Officer:

Signed by the Corporate Director

Date:

Mandatory Checks

Ward Councillors notified: NO, as it impacts on all Wards

Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Report Author: Harminder Dhillon, Complaints & Information Requests Services Manager, People Services

Background Papers:

Appendix A – Children’s Services Annual Complaints & Feedback Report 2022/23

If appropriate, does the report include the following considerations?

- | | |
|-----------------|----|
| 1. Consultation | NO |
| 2. Priorities | NO |