



Safeguarding and Family Support People Directorate London Borough of Islington

Children's Social Care Annual Complaints Report 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021

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2 Context

The Social Services statutory complaints procedure requires that an annual report must be produced for children's social care complaints.

This report provides information about complaints made during the twelve months between 1 April 2019 and the 31 March 2020 under the complaints and representations procedures established through the Local Authority Social Services Complaints (England) Regulations 2006, the Representations (Children) Regulations 2006 and the Council's corporate complaints procedure.

2.1 What is a complaint?

The guidance 'Getting the best from Complaints' produced by the Department for Education and Skills (DfE) provides advice for local authorities on implementing the Children Act 1989 complaints procedure for children and young people and defines a complaint as:

'A complaint may be generally defined as an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet in relation to an individual child or young person, which requires a response.'

2.2 Who can make a complaint?

Section 26(3) and section 24D of the Children Act, 1989 and section 3(1) of the Adoption and Children Act, 2002 require councils to consider complaints made by:

- any child or young person (or a parent of his or someone who has parental responsibility for him) who is being looked after by the local authority or is not looked after by them but is in need
- any local authority foster carer (including those caring for children placed through independent fostering agencies)
- children leaving care
- Special Guardians
- A child or young person (or parent of his) to whom a Special Guardian order is in force
- Any person who has applied for an assessment under section 14F (3) or (4)
- Any child or young person who may be adopted, their parents and guardians
- Persons wishing to adopt a child
- Any other person whom arrangements for the provision of adoption services extend
- Adopted persons, their parents, natural parents and former guardians
- Such other person as the local authority consider has sufficient interest in the child or young person's welfare to warrant his representations being considered by them.

3 Stages of the complaints procedure

The statutory social care complaints procedure has three stages.

3.1 Stage 1 – Local Resolution (Problem Solving)

This is the most important stage of the complaints procedure. The Safeguarding and Family Support Services managers and external contractors provide services on behalf of the Council are expected to resolve as many complaints as possible at this initial point.

The statutory social care complaints procedure requires complaints at Stage 1 to be responded to within 10 working days; however, Safeguarding and Family Support Services can apply for an extension of a further 10 days where a complaint is complex.

The vast majority of complaints are successfully resolved at Stage 1, which indicates that front line managers are making an effort to listen to clients and work with them to reach mutually acceptable outcomes.

3.2 Stage 2 – Independent Investigation

This stage is usually implemented where the complainant is dissatisfied with the findings of Stage 1. However, Mediation is considered as a complaints handling tool to resolve ongoing concerns at the end of the Stage 1 complaints process and before Stage 2 is evoked.

Stage 2 is an investigation conducted by an external investigating officer. An additional independent person also works alongside the investigating officer. The Director of Safeguarding and Family Support Services adjudicates on the findings of all Stage 2 complaints.

Stage 2 complaints falling within the statutory social care complaints procedure should be dealt with within 25 days, although in certain cases this can be extended to 65 working days.

3.3 Stage 3 – Review Panel

Stage 3 of the statutory social care complaints process is a Review Panel.

Where complainants wish to continue with their complaint about statutory social services functions, the Council is required to establish a complaint Review Panel. Review Panels are only open to complainants who have had their complaints investigated at Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the complaints process. The panel makes recommendations to the Corporate Director who then makes a decision on the complaint and any action to be taken. Complaint Review Panels are made up of three independent panellists.

There are various timescales relating to Stage 3 complaints. These include:

- Arranging the Panel within 30 working days;
- Producing the Panel's report within a further 5 working days; and
- Producing the Council's response within 15 working days.

A further option for complainants is the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO).

The LGSCO is an independent organisation who is empowered to investigate where it appears that a Council's own investigations have not resolved the complaint. The LGSCO is a free, independent and impartial service. Complainants can refer their complaint to the LGSCO at any time, although the LGSCO will normally allow the Council to consider the complaint first and will refer the complainant back to the Council unless exceptional criteria are met.

3.4 Other Complaints

Not all complaints relating to children social care services will be dealt with under the Children Act statutory complaints procedure as those procedures relate particularly to complaints made by or on behalf of a child or young person. Occasionally the department receives complaints which do not fit into this category and these are dealt with using the Council's corporate complaints procedure. For instance, a potential foster carer or adopter complaining about the process and/or outcome of their assessment. The Council's

corporate complaints procedure has 2 internal stages. Stage 1 is investigated and responded to by the relevant manager within Safeguarding and Family Support Services, and then Stage 2 is investigated and responded to by the Council's Corporate Complaints Team. Thereafter complainants are advised to approach the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman if they remain unhappy with the Council's action/s.

Complaints in relation to Child Protection Conferences and the decision of children being made the subject of a Child Protection plan are also dealt with under their own procedures. Stage 1 – Local Resolution is a meeting with the Child Protection Manager (Service Manager, Safeguarding and Quality Assurance) who will meet and then respond to the complainant in writing within 20 working days. If the complainant remains unhappy and requests the complaint is escalated, it is referred to Stage 2. At Stage 2 a panel is convened to review the Child Protection Conference decision. The panel should be convened within 20 working days of the request and is made up of senior representatives from Islington Safeguarding Children's Board.

4 Overview

From 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 inclusive the department had 10,620 (11,677) contacts made to Children's Services Contact Team.

Of which in 2020/2021, there were as followed:

- 1,900 (2,173) Child & Family (Child in Need) Single Assessments completed
- 499 (495) children with 510 (503) periods of care Looked after Children throughout the year
- 909 (866) Children Looked After (CLA) reviews completed
- 979 (1075) the number with an open referral Children in Need (CIN) cases (at year end)
- 194 (199) Child Protection cases (at year end)

As a comparison, the figure in the bracket is the 2019/2020 data.

In 2020/2021, the following communications were received from service users, parents, carers and/or their representatives:

- 76 compliments
- 9 representations
- 96 complaints
- 6 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman enquiries and complaints

Common themes of complaints received regarding Safeguarding and Family Support Services are:

- Conduct and/or attitude of staff
- Quality of service
- Information/communication
- Placement issues

Of which, just over one-third (35%) of the 92 Stage 1 complaints received were considered justified in full or in part.

We continue to aim to:

- Resolve complaints as quickly and informally, where possible
- Learn lessons from complaints to inform practice in the future
- Improve and deliver better customer services to our service users
- Reduce escalations, thereby reducing overall cost to the Council
- Use alternative complaints procedures where possible, to reduce the overall cost to the council

5 Learning from complaints

Customers expect their interaction with Safeguarding and Family Support Services to be professional and positive, despite the difficult circumstances families are often in, and in the main this is the case. When things go wrong swift action is expected to be taken to resolve the matters causing concern.

The complaints process provides the council with an additional means of monitoring performance and improving service quality, and provides an important opportunity to learn from complaints.

There is an established system in place to capture a range of complaints information including the nature of the complaint, the action taken, the outcome of each complaint and whether there was compliance with the time periods specified in the Regulations. The information captured from this monitoring is used in a number of ways including:

- The provision of feedback and the dissemination of the information to managers, to improve systems and procedures
- Measurement of performance and quality control
- Where services are purchased under contract, informing the appropriate service i.e. Commissioning (Placements Team) who monitor each contract.

In Safeguarding and Family Support Services from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 lessons have been learnt in only a few cases of the complaints investigated.

5.1 Service improvements

The nature and complexities of delivering social care services means that at times Safeguarding and Family Support Services can learn from complaint investigations. As a result, the department aim to improve service delivery and the experience of our service users based on the findings from complaints. Some complaint outcomes are a matter of putting things right for the individual and apologising to the complainant and/or service user. Other outcomes may have a wider significance on service delivery.

The lessons highlighted below have come from complaints received throughout the year in 2019/2020, with changes already made based upon the learning, followed by recommendations that staff have been asked to note.

5.1.1 Social work practice

- The requirement to attempt to contact fathers early on in interventions, where appropriate.
- The requirement to seek father's views and include these in reports.
- Carefully consider the timing of contacting fathers where there is Domestic Violence Abuse (e.g. should this be done if there is a pending police investigation).
- Ensure social workers seek expert advice when working with fathers.
- The requirement to continue to use our Practice Model to understand the trauma that impacts on a Young Persons behaviour and to also be non-judgemental.
- The need to recognise the emotional vulnerability of our looked after children and foster carers.
- Where parents struggle with meetings consideration for an advocate to be allocated, to guide them through the process.
- Re- evaluation practice where there is inconsistency across the service with written Life Story work and later life letters to service users.
- The requirement for each care provider to record a comprehensive, descriptive itinerary of each child/young person's belongings at arrival and on leaving the placement so there can be no dispute to what the young person had. This should be agreed and signed for by the social worker.
- Each young person's independence skills to be considered in its own right, to ensure that any move on placement i.e. TA is suitable.
- Child/young person to be advised when worker is off sick/on leave and who to contact in their absence.
- Staff to ensure that review meetings are held within appropriate time frames, such as placement meetings, where issues and any changes in care planning, support and fees are discussed.

- Awareness of role of Social Worker regarding making factual judgements.

5.1.2 Customer care

- Management should be made aware of issues that could potentially become a complaint in a timely manner.
- Calls and letters to the potential complainants should always be made in the first instance in an attempt to resolve the matter before reaching a formal Stage 1 complaint.
- Staff to be careful with their use of language.
- During the pandemic and the move to greater more virtual contact with families, it can be easy to answer another call, whilst in the middle of a virtual meeting. Ensuring that practitioners avoid answering another phone, where possible, whilst in the middle of an existing call.
- Service users updated when meetings are scheduled but arrangements need to be changed
- Ensuring that out of office responses give the name of an alternative contact who is available to assist.
- Information to be provided to all staff named in a Stage 1 complaint - to help them feel prepared and supported throughout the process.

5.2 Recommendations

Following on from the identified learnings, staff and managers within Safeguarding and Family Support Services are asked, where appropriate, to implement the following recommendations:

5.2.1 Social work practice

- Social workers are encouraged to book consultations with Domestic Violence Intervention Project (DVIP), where appropriate.
- Social workers are encouraged to seek advice from partner agencies, e.g. Police, probation etc. before contacting fathers, especially where the case involves domestic violence abuse and/or child abuse, if it is felt contacting the father could compromise the police investigation before contacting him.
- Managers are expected to support Social Workers in their way of working, in terms of listening to young people and being supportive, while supporting the carer and placement.
- Social workers are encouraged to explore joint working on cases, which may prove beneficial, i.e. TAC meetings, CAMHS consultations and PACE for parenting working
- Joint working - staff being able to understand their own feelings and emotions and how that impacts on our dialogue with young people.
- All staff to revisit policies and procedures periodically to ensure they're kept abreast of new protocols/Guidance within the service.
- Individual reflection with Social Worker.
- Share feedback in team meetings around any learning obtained, including sub group discussions.
- Social workers are reminded to check their itinerary on visits and when moving around the borough.
- More thinking should be done with some young people to ensure they are in the most suitable accommodation to match their needs.
- Clear plans should be in place for young people so they know what timescales they are working towards when they have a clear goal in mind.
- We need to ensure young people are aware of the availability of their workers and who to contact in their absence.

5.2.2 Customer care

- Continue to communicate with young people and their families in a timely, polite and respectful manner.
- Where appropriate, staff to have more consistent communication with other departments and providers.

- Staff to better manage expectations from the beginning of contact with services users and their families in relation to timescales involved and what is possible, consider the pandemic/other restrictions.
- Staff to avoid taking other calls whilst in virtual Microsoft Teams meetings, and mute themselves if taking other calls, and/or check that the phone call/virtual meeting has ended before continuing with the existing call.
- Staff accepting mistakes can happen and where appropriate, apologising and/or sending a letter of apology in recognition of any error/oversight.
- All managers/staff have been reminded of the need to update their out of office to ensure that the alternative contact (usually their manager) is available.
- Notes for Staff information revised and sent to all complaints investigating managers to share with their staff ahead of all Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaint investigations.

6 Compliments

6.1 Number of compliments

Table 1 shows the total number of compliments recorded in Safeguarding and Family Support Services from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 compared to the previous three years.

Table 1: Number of compliments received in the last four years

Year	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021
Compliments	71	82	74	76

6.2 Compliments by period, service area and team

The volume of compliments received over the past four years has been relatively high and similar in numbers.

It is difficult to benchmark performance or capture themes/trends in relation to compliments; however, overall it indicates that good practice is happening across the department and some of our service users and partner agencies are grateful and satisfied with aspects of the service provided by Safeguarding and Family Support.

The compliments received are varied and range from individual messages of gratitude to specific members of staff; i.e. support staff, social workers and managers, by email to thank you cards for the work a team has done for the children/young person or family. See Appendix 1 - Compliments.

Table 2 shows the number of compliments recorded in Safeguarding and Family Support Services by the period, service area and team.

Table 2: Compliments by period, service area and team

Service	Team	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
Children in Need	CSCT	0	0	1	0
	Disabled Children's Team	3	10	1	2
	EDT	2	0	0	0
	Lough Road	3	0	5	11
	Personalisation Team	2	0	0	4
	Specialist Family Support	0	0	0	0
	CIN Team 1 Barnsbury	7	6	2	3
	CIN Team 2 Canonbury	2	1	3	1
	CIN Team 3 Finsbury	2	7	5	0
	CIN Team 4 Highbury	3	2	4	5
	CIN Team 5 Hornsey	3	4	2	3
	CIN Team 6 Holloway	4	7	4	2
	Drug & Alcohol Service (IYPDAS)	0	2	0	0
	YOS	2	5	21	15
	Early Intervention Team	0	2	2	0
	Families First	5	11	3	0
	CIN Provider	2	1	3	0
Total	40	58	56	46	
Children Looked After	CLA	0	0	0	1
	Adoption	1	2	0	1
	Contact Centre	0	0	0	0
	Independent Futures	1	4	10	3
	Family Plus (Permanence)	1	1	1	4
	Fostering	4	0	0	1
	CLA Team 1	8	3	1	10
	CLA Team 2	0	1	0	4
	CLA Team 3	3	1	-	-
	Virtual School	0	0	0	1
Total	18	12	12	25	
Commissioning & Business Sup.	Business Support	1	0	1	1
	Total	1	0	1	1
Safeguarding & Quality Assurance	Access to Records	1	4	4	2
	CAIS	0	1	1	0
	Child Protection Team	3	1	0	1
	Complaints Team	0	2	0	0
	Independent Reviewing Team	2	1	0	0
	Family Group Conference	0	1	0	1
	Anti-Bullying & DV Prevent	0	1	0	0
	CSE/MISSING	2	1	0	0
	Workforce Development	4	0	0	0
Total	12	12	5	4	
Overall Total	71	82	74	76	

7 Representations

Service users and/or their representatives may make representations about the contact they have had with Safeguarding and Family Support Services or the service they have received without necessarily making a complaint under the formal procedure.

A representation may be regarded as a comment, enquiry or statement of a formal nature regarding matters such as the availability, delivery or nature of services. They will not necessarily be critical. They can be taken into account when assessing the quality of a service provided, but are not usually viewed as a complaint. The issue may be critical but the service user does not wish to go through the complaints procedure.

7.1 Number of representations

Table 3 shows the total number of new representations recorded in Safeguarding and Family Support Services from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 compared to the previous three years and the number of representations that escalated to a formal complaint.

Table 3: Representations

Year	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021
Representations	8	13	8	9
Escalated to formal complaints procedure	1	1	0	0

In 2020/2021, the representations received were low and none were escalated to a Stage 1 complaint. This indicates that the Department takes concerns raised seriously and take steps to successfully resolve these as early as possible.

7.2 Representations by period and service area

Table 4 shows a breakdown of representations recorded in Safeguarding and Family Support Services from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 by period and service area, compared to the previous three years.

Table 4: Number of representations recorded in the last 4 years by period received and service area

Service Area	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021
Children in Need	1	5 (1)	4	7
Children Looked After	7 (1)	6	4	2
Targeted Services (Non CSC)	0	2	0	0
Total no. of representations	8	13	8	9

8 Complaints activity

All timescales in this report are in working days.

This report sits within the wider context of complaints activity in Islington as a whole. In 2020/2021, the number of new Stage 1 complaints received across the council was 2433 compared to 2529 in the previous year. This is a decrease of 4%.

Table 5 shows the total number of new Stage 1 complaints recorded in the council as a whole from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021, compared to the previous three years.

Table 5: Number of complaints recorded in Islington by period

Year	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021
Number of complaints	2388	2182	2529	2433

Table 6 shows the total number of new complaints recorded in Safeguarding and Family Support from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021, compared to the previous nine years.

Table 6: Number of complaints recorded in SFS by period

11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21
57	48	61	90	98	104	85	81	102	96

In 2020/2021, the number of complaints received in Safeguarding and Family Support decreased by 6% in comparison to 2019/2020. The number of complaints received is lower than in previous years; however, not too dissimilar to the decrease in the number of contacts made to the department in the same period.

Complaints are reviewed to ensure that any patterns in relation to reoccurring issues are identified and addressed.

8.1 Complaints compared to compliments

Table 7 shows the total number of complaints recorded in Safeguarding and Family Support from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021, compared to the total number of compliments recorded and gives a comparison to the previous three years.

Table 6: Number of complaints and compliments recorded in SFS

Year	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021
Complaints	85	81	102	96
Compliments	71	82	74	76

8.2 Complaints by procedure

Table 8 shows the distribution of complaints recorded in Safeguarding and Family Support from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 by complaints procedure and gives a comparison to the previous three years.

Table 7: Complaints by procedure

Year	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021
Statutory complaints	58	55	85	86
Corporate complaints	27	26	17	10
Total	85	81	102	96

In 2020/2021 of the 96 complaints recorded during this period, 86 were dealt with under the statutory social care complaints procedure and 10 dealt with under the council's complaints procedure.

8.3 Complaints by period and stage

Table 9 shows the total number of complaints recorded in Safeguarding and Family Support from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 by the stage of the complaint and gives a comparison to the previous three years.

Table 8: Number of complaints by period and stage

Year	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021
Stage 1 complaints	81	75	99	92
Stage 2/CE complaints	3	4	2	3
Stage 3 complaints	1	2	1	1
Total	85	81	102	96

In 2020/2021 of the complaints received, 92 were investigated at Stage 1 of the statutory children's social care complaints procedure, 3 escalated to Stage 2 and 1 complaint escalated onto Stage 3 – Review Panel hearing.

Under the statutory children social care complaints procedure, it is not possible to prevent complainants from escalating their complaint to Stage 2 or Stage 3 if the complaint has been accepted and investigated at Stage 1, even if the complaint is unfounded/not upheld. There will always be an element of complainants who, having had their complaints not upheld or only partially upheld at Stage 1, will automatically insist their complaint is escalated to Stage 2 and on occasion, to Stage 3 – Review Panel hearing.

8.4 Complaints by service area, team and stage

Tables 10 to 15 show the total number of complaints recorded in Safeguarding and Family Support from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 by service area, team and stage, compared with the previous three years.

Table 10: Children in Need

Year	2017/2018			2018/2019			2019/2020			2020/2021		
Stage	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3
CIN Team 1 Barnsbury	5	1	1	4	2	0	6	0	1	3	0	0
CIN Team 2 Canonbury	4	0	0	3	0	0	10	0	0	5	0	0
CIN Team 3 Finsbury	2	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0
CIN Team 4 Highbury	6	0	0	3	0	0	11	0	0	7	1	1
CIN Team 5 Hornsey	7	1	0	7	1	0	4	0	0	2	0	0
CIN Team 6 Holloway	2	1	0	1	0	1	2	0	0	8	0	0
CSCCT	4	0	0	2	0	0	5	0	0	3	0	0
Disabled Children's Team	9	0	0	8	0	0	11	1	0	7	0	0
Emergency Duty Team	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Lough Road	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0
CIN Provider – IFIT, FF	2	0	0	2	0	0	3	0	0	1	0	0
Children in Need	42	3	1	36	3	1	53	1	1	42	1	1
TOTAL	46			40			55			44		

Table 11: Children Looked After

Year	2017/2018			2018/2019			2019/2020			2020/2021		
Stage	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3
Virtual School	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Adoption	2	0	0	1	0	0	4	0	0	4	0	0
CLA Team 1	8	0	0	3	0	0	14	0	0	11	0	0
CLA Team 2	5	0	0	4	1	1	6	0	0	11	1	0
CLA Team 3	6	0	0	9	0	0	1	0	-	-	-	-
Contact Centre	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Family Plus (Permanence)	1	0	0	1	0	0	4	0	0	2	0	0
Fostering	2	0	0	5	0	0	3	0	0	3	0	0
Historical CLA	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Independent Futures	12	0	0	10	0	0	9	0	0	18	1	0
Children Looked After	38	0	0	34	1	1	43	0	0	49	2	0
TOTAL	38			36			43			51		

Table 12: Information and Commissioning

Year	2017/2018			2018/2019			2019/2020			2020/2021		
Stage	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3
Business Support	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Commissioning	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
Information and Commissioning	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	0			0			3			0		

Table 13: Safeguarding and Quality Assurance

Year	2017/2018			2018/2019			2019/2020			2020/2021		
Stage	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3
Access to Records	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Child Protection	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Customer Care & Complaints	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Independent Reviewing Team	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
S&QA	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	1	0	0	4	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
TOTAL	1			4			1			1		

Table 14: Other (non-Children's Social Care)

Year	2017/2018			2018/2019			2019/2020			2020/2021		
Stage	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3
Other	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	0			0			0			0		

Table 15: Totals

Year	2017/2018			2018/2019			2019/2020			2020/2021		
Stage	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3
Children in Need	42	3	1	36	3	1	53	1	1	42	1	1
Children Looked After	38	0	0	34	1	1	43	0	0	49	2	0
Information and Commissioning	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0
Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	1	0	0	4	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Other	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sub-total	81	0	1	75	4	2	99	1	1	92	3	1
TOTAL	82			81			101			96		

Of all of CIN teams, CIN Holloway received the highest number of complaints for the first time in the last four years.

In 2020/2021 CIN Holloway received 8 complaints, which was a significant increase on the previous year; however, the referral rate and caseload in CIN Holloway was twice as high as some of the other CIN teams during the same period. Also, 3 of the cases were involved in court proceedings, which often result in an aggrieved party.

Of the 8 complaints received in CIN Holloway in 2020/2021:

- 4 (50%) complaints were in relation to the conduct and/or attitude of staff
- 2 (25%) complaints were in relation to communication/information issues
- 1 (13%) complaint was in relation to assessment disagreement issues
- 1 (13%) complaint was in relation to service delay

Of the 8 complaints received - 3 (38%) were partially upheld following investigation and 5 (62%) were not upheld.

Of all the CLA teams, Independent Futures received 19 complaints. This is a substantial increase on the previous year, despite 3 complaints being withdrawn/NFA discontinued. Having said that Independent Futures were supporting almost 600 young people in 2020/2021, whereby in 2019/2020 they were supporting 520 young people, an increase of 15%. (It should also be noted that the number of young people supported in Independent Futures is approximately double the amount of children and young people each CLA team holds.

Of the 19 complaints received in Independent Futures in 2020/2021:

- 7 (37%) complaints were in relation to placement/accommodation issues
- 3 (16%) complaints were in relation to assessment disagreement issues
- 2 (11%) complaint were in relation to support disagreement issues
- 2 (11%) complaints were in relation to communication/information issues
- 2 (11%) complaints were in relation to quality of service issues
- 1 (5%) complaint was in relation to finance concerns
- 1 (5%) complaint was in relation to the conduct and/or attitude of staff
- 1 (5%) complaint was categorised as Other

Of the 19 complaints received in Independent Futures in 2020/2021, 2 (11%) complaints were upheld following investigation, 4 (21%) were partially upheld, 10 (53%) not upheld and 3 (16%) complaints, as stated above were withdrawn by the complainant or NFA/discontinued.

8.5 Complaints by subject category

Table 16 shows the total number of complaints recorded in Safeguarding and Family Support from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 recorded by subject category, compared with the previous year.

Attempts have been made to categorise the subject matter of each complaint; however, it should be noted that some complaints comprise of more than one issue. For example, complaints about quality of service is sometimes interconnected with information/communication complaints.

Table 16: Number of SFS complaints recorded in last 3 years by subject category

Complaint subject	2018/19 Number	2018/19 %	2019/20 Number	2019/20 %	2020/21 Number	2020/21 %
Alleged historical abuse	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Assessment delay	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Quality of assessment	1	1%	1	1%	0	0%
Assessment disagreement	9	10%	12	12%	9	9%
Assessment request	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%
Conduct and/or attitude of staff	18	23%	26	25%	32	33%
Contact	5	6%	8	8%	4	4%
Finance	2	3%	4	4%	3	3%
Historic Case: Support Disagreement	0	0%	1	1%	0	0%
Information/communication incl. data protection	16	20%	15	15%	12	13%
Lack of Support	4	5%	0	0%	1	1%
Late/missed appointments	0	0%	1	1%	0	0%
No response to previous communication	2	3%	0	0%	0	0%
Placement issues	7	9%	5	5%	13	14%
Quality of service	9	11%	13	12%	15	16%
Referral disagreement	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Service delay	5	6%	6	6%	1	1%
Support disagreement	1	1%	2	2%	2	2%
Other (including lost belongings, Housing)	1	1%	8	8%	4	4%
Total	81	100%	102	100%	96	100%

Whilst numbers for complaints in individual categories are small, it is important to examine the areas where we receive the most complaints in order to learn. The two highest subject categories were 'Conduct and/or attitude of staff', which has increased from 26 (25%); complaints to 32 (33%); then 'Quality of Service' which has increased from 13 (12%) complaints to 15 (16%).

The two categories make up 47 (49%) of all complaints received.

- 'Conduct and/or attitude of staff' = 32 (33%) complaints: Of which 3 (9%) complaints were upheld, 9 (28%) complaints were partially upheld (partially founded), 18 (56%) complaints were not upheld (unfounded), 1 (3%) complaint was NFA (no further action)/discontinued and 1 (3%) complaint withdrawn.

- 'Quality of Service' - 15 (16%): 1 (7%) of the complaints received were upheld, 4 (27%) complaints were partially upheld, whilst 10 (67%) complaints were not upheld.

In the two categories that featured most highly, 17 (36%) of the complaints were justified, being upheld or partially upheld.

8.6 Complaints by outcome

Table 3h below shows the total number of complaints in Safeguarding and Family Support Services recorded by outcome in the past four years, whether the complaints were upheld (well founded), partially upheld (partially founded) and not upheld (unfounded).

Table 17: Stage 1 complaints by outcome

Year	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld	Other	Total no. of complaints
2017/2018	13 (16%)	19 (23%)	46 (56%)	3 (4%)	81 (100%)
2018/2019	9 (12%)	18 (24%)	44 (59%)	4 (5%)	75 (100%)
2019/2020	11 (11%)	25 (25%)	51 (52%)	12 (12%)	99 (100%)
2020/2021	8 (9%)	24 (26%)	53 (58%)	7 (8%)	92 (100%)

In 2020/2021, of the 92 Stage 1 complaints received 8 (9%) were upheld, 24 (26%) were partially upheld and 53 (58%) were not upheld.

Therefore, 35 (38%) of the complaints investigated were considered to be upheld (justified) in full or in part and 58% were not upheld. This is not dissimilar to the previous three years in 2017/2018, 2018/2019 and 2019/2020.

In 2020/2021 of the 3 Stage 2 complaints received, 1 (33%) was not upheld and 2 (67%) was partially upheld and the 1 Stage 3 complaint received was (100%) partially upheld.

8.7 Timeliness of complaint responses

The council's objective is that 95% of all new complaints are responded to within the target timescale. The increase in statutory complaints has an associated impact on achievability of responding to complaints within the set timescales, especially as the complaints received are increasingly more complex.

8.7.1 Stage 1 complaints

Table 18 shows the total number of Stage 1 complaints recorded in Safeguarding and Family Support Services from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021, in relation to the timeliness of the complaint responses, compared with the previous three years.

Table 18: Timeliness of Stage 1 complaint responses

Year	Timescale met	Timescale not met	Other (i.e. withdrawn)	Total no. of complaints
2017/2018	56 (69%)	25 (31%)	0 (0%)	81 (100%)
2018/2019	60 (80%)	12 (16%)	3 (4%)	75 (100%)
2019/2020	71 (72%)	18 (18%)	10 (10%)	99 (100%)
2020/2021	52 (57%)	37 (40%)	3 (3%)	92 (100%)

NB. Stage 1 complaints responded to within 15/20 working days are included as being within timescale.

In 2020/2021, 52 of the 92 Stage 1 complaints received and completed by the department were responded to within the relevant timescale, meaning we achieved 57% compliance. This is not as good as the

previous year, as in comparison, in 2019/2020, 71 of the 99 Stage 1 complaints received and completed by the department were responded to within the relevant timescale, meaning we achieved 72% compliance. The reduction in compliance was possibly due to the uncertainty at the beginning of the Corona virus pandemic which severely affected the way we work.

However, it is important to note that where the set or agreed timescales were not met, complainants were routinely kept informed and updated throughout the investigation process by the allocated investigating manager and/or the Customer Care and Complaints Manager.

8.7.2 Stage 2 complaints

Table 19 shows the total number of Stage 2 complaints received in Safeguarding and Family Support Services from 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021, in relation to the timeliness of the complaint response, compared to the previous three years.

Table 19: Timeliness of Stage 2 complaint responses

Year	Timescale met	Timescale not met	Total no. of complaints
2017/2018	3 (100%)	0 (0%)	3 (100%)
2018/2019	1 (25%)	3 (75%)	4 (100%)
2019/2020	2 (100%)	0 (0%)	2 (100%)
2020/2021	2 (67%)	1 (33%)	3 (100%)

NB: Stage 2 complaints responded to within 65 working days are included as being within timescale

At Stage 2 – independent investigation the initial deadline for responding to complaints is 25 working days, which is very tight and unrealistic in most cases, as the complaints tend to be complex and multifaceted. However, with the agreement of the complainant, the timescale can be extended to 65 working days, from the date the complaint is agreed. These investigations are carried out at the discretion of the Principal Complaints Officer who is based in the Council’s Central Complaints Team.

Of the 3 Stage 2 complaints received from the 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021, all 3 were dealt with under the statutory social care complaints procedure. Of which 2 complaints were completed within the dedicated timescales and 1 complaint outside the given timescale.

8.7.3 Stage 3 complaints

Table 20 shows the total number of Stage 3 complaints received in Safeguarding and Family Support Services from 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021, in relation to the timeliness of the complaint response, compared to the previous three years.

Table 20: Timeliness of Stage 3 complaint responses

Year	Timescale met	Timescale not met	Total no. of complaints
2017/2018	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)
2018/2019	2 (100%)	0 (0%)	2 (100%)
2019/2020	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)
2020/2021	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)

The 1 and only Stage 3 complaint received from the 1 April 2020 to the 31 March 2021 was dealt with under the statutory social care complaints procedure and within the timescales set out on the statutory regulations.

8.8 Complaints by relationship to the service user

Table 21 shows a breakdown of complaints recorded in Safeguarding and Family Support from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 by relationship to the service user, compared to the three previous years.

Table 21: Complaints by relationship to the service user

Year	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021
Advocate	15	12	9	15
Child in need	0	1	0	1
Child/young person being looked after	1	3	2	2
Child leaving care	3	5	3	1
Parent	53	53	68	65
Foster carer	5	1	2	5
Persons with sufficient interest in the child's welfare	3	0	12	4
Partner agency	1	0	0	0
Other	4	6	6	3
Total	85	81	102	96

As might be expected the highest number of complaints are received from parents and year on year the number remains similar.

In 2020/2021 'Advocate', including solicitors was the second highest category with 15 (16%) complaints and an increase on the previous year. Of the 15 complaints received from advocates, 11 (73%) were from Action for Children, who are commissioned by CAIS, ensuring our young people are being empowered and actively supported through the formal complaints process.

8.9 Complaints by ethnicity with comparative data

Table 22 shows the number of complaints recorded in Safeguarding and Family Support from 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021 by ethnicity, with comparative data.

Table 22: Complaints by ethnicity with comparative data

	Complaints in 2020/2021	% of complaints in 2020/2021	No. of service users 2020/2021	Islington's Child population*
White British	23	24%	25%	32%
White Irish	1	1%	-	-
White Other	15	16%	10%	18%
Total - White	39	41%	35%	50%
Mixed White & Black Caribbean	4	4%	-	-
Mixed White & Black African	1	1%	-	-
Mixed White & Asian	0	0	-	-
Mixed British	0	0	-	-
Mixed Other	0	0	-	-
Mixed Not Stated/Unknown	10	10%	-	-
Total - Mixed	15	16%	21%	14%
Indian	0	0	-	-
Pakistani	1	1%	-	-
Bangladeshi	2	2%	-	-
Other Asian	2	2%	-	-
Asian / Asian British	0	0	-	-
Total - Asian	5	5%	7%	8%
Caribbean	0	0	8%	5%
African	0	0	16%	9%
Black British Caribbean	8	8%	-	-
Black British African	10	10%	-	-
Other Black	0	0	6%	8%
Other Black British	5	5%	-	-
Total - Black	23	24%	30%	22%
Not Stated / Unknown	12	13%	3%	-
Other	2	2%	4%	6%
TOTAL	96	100%	100%	100%

NB. Islington population figure from database of Islington Children - September 2016

In 2020/2021 the ethnic profile of complainants was found to be reasonably reflective of the service user population.

8.10 Complaint by source

Table 23 shows the number of complaints received in Safeguarding and Family Support from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 by the source. It is evident that the majority (93%) of complainants prefer to communicate with the department in the first instance via email.

Table 23: Complaints by source

Source	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021
Contact Form	0	6	13	3
Email	78	62	75	89
In Person	2	2	3	0
Letter	2	6	6	1
LGSCO	2	0	1	0
Telephone	1	5	4	2
Text Message	0	0	0	1
Total	85	81	102	96

9 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) enquiries and complaints

Table 24 shows the total number of new LGSCO enquiries and complaints received in Safeguarding and Family Support from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020, compared to the previous three years.

Table 24: Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman enquiries and complaints

Year	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021
Notice	1	0	0	0
Enquiries	2	3	1	4
Complaints	1	1	2	2
Other (i.e. outside jurisdiction)	0	1	0	0
Total	4	5	3	6

The number of LGSCO notices, enquiries and complaints have increased in 2020/2021; however, the number is still relative and low.

Of the six cases received from the LGSCO in 2020/2021 - 4 enquiries were *Closed after initial enquiries, with no further action to be taken*. Of the two complaints that were received, in one the LGSCO decision *Will not investigate complaint, falls outside jurisdiction* and in the other case, the complaint was found - *Not upheld: no maladministration*.

10 Cost

10.1 Stage 2 and Stage 3 complaints independent (external) people

Table 25 shows a breakdown of the cost in delivering the statutory social care complaints process in Safeguarding and Family Support from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 and gives a comparison to the previous three years.

Table 25: Cost of Stage 2 and Stage 3 complaints

Year	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021
Investigating Officers	£4927.45	£6960.25	£159.20	£4800.94
Independent Persons	£1475.75	£1568.75	£501.80	£1610.00
Review Panellists	£1166.20	£3816.15	£1876.10	£1697.50
Total	£7,569.40	£12,345.15	£2537.10	£8108.44

10.2 Compensation/ex-gratia payments

Table 26 shows a breakdown of compensation/ex-gratia payments made by Safeguarding and Family Support from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 in relation to complaints.

Table 26: Compensation/ex-gratia payments offered

Year	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021
Stage 1 complaints	£4,150.00	£5132.00	£5458.00	£17,900.00
Stage 2 complaints	£3,000.00	£100.00	£0	£0
Stage 3 complaints	£800.00	£0	£0	£0
Stage 4 - LGSCO	£400.00	£0	£0	£0
Total	£8,350.00	£5232.00	£5458.00	£17,900.00

If it is appropriate to do so, compensation should be offered and paid at Stage 1 of the complaints process. In 2020/2021, the compensation was offered in relation to 6 complaints. All 6 complaints were at Stage 1 of the complaints process; 2 complaints from the CIN Service (Canonbury team), 2 complaints from Independent Futures, 1 complaint from CLA - Team 1 and one from the CLA - Team 2.

The amounts paid varied and were in relation to additional legal fees, setting up allowance, clothing, including loss of clothing, replacement furniture, support costs, time and trouble for pursuing their complaint etc. However, 2 complaints alone amounted to £15,000 of the compensation total paid – a complainant from CIN was paid £5000 for additional legal fees incurred and the other was to a care leaver complainant in Independent Futures who was offered £10,000 in compensation for the lack of appropriate support afforded to her as a young person many years before.

11 London complaints network

The Customer Care and Complaints Manager normally works closely with colleagues from the London Complaints Managers group meeting several times each year to ensure that Safeguarding and Family Support Services is kept informed and in a position to adopt as consistent an approach to complaints handling as possible; however, since the 1 April 2020 with the onset of the Corona virus pandemic the work of this group has been solely online and virtual via Microsoft Outlook and Teams.

12 Conclusion

Considering the number of contacts, the department has, the number of people assessed and in receipt of services; together with the nature of the work, this continues to be a relatively low figure, and there should be no concern that the department is receiving too many complaints.

The number of complaints dealt with under the corporate complaints procedure this year is less than previous years; however, appropriate due to the nature of the complaints received. Using Islington's corporate complaints procedure can potentially save money for the department as complaints do not then escalate to the expensive and time-consuming statutory social care Stage 2 complaint - independent investigation and Stage 3 – review panel hearing process.

It is recognised that frontline teams have a variety of pressures they need to manage and in the coming year it is important that complaints feature high on their list of priorities.

13 Moving forward - 2021/2022

The Customer Care and Complaints Service will continue to deal with complaints, where appropriate, under alternative procedures to the Children Act statutory social care procedure. However, Michael King, Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, makes it clear on their website that *"Our answer is the statutory complaints process is set out in law so we expect councils to follow the guidance and regulations as they stand, and will hold them to account should they not do so."*

Full use of the Data Protection Act, Council, Child Protection and any appeal procedures will continue to be utilised where they are available.

The recommendations for next year – 2021/2022 are that:

- The Customer Care and Complaints Manager will provide a summary of the Annual Complaints Report for children social care managers and staff
- The Customer Care and Complaints Manager will provide a quarterly complaints report for children social care senior managers
- The Customer Care and Complaints Manager will continue to encourage managers to consider the benefits of virtual face-to-face discussions (Resolution Meetings) when investigating complaints

- The Customer Care and Complaints Manager and line managers where required to support individual members of staff during the complaint investigation process, as it can be very upsetting and stressful for those involved.
- Customer Care and Complaints Service to continue to be promoted through the Children's Active Involvement Service
- The Customer Care and Complaints Manager will continue to work with colleagues from the London Complaints Managers group and the Central Complaints Team to ensure Safeguarding and Family Support Services remain informed and in a position to adopt as consistent an approach to complaints handling as possible
- Aim to reduce the number of complaint escalations, thereby reducing overall cost to the Council
- Consider learning events for disseminating and promoting key learning points from complaints throughout the department.
- Each service should review the complaints received and identify common issues and themes and how they will resolve these through specific objectives.
- Each service should review the complaints received and identify common issues and themes and how they will resolve these through specific objectives.
- Each service should take steps to remind their customers of how to provide feedback, and actively promote this through all of their interaction with customers.

Appendix 1 - Compliments

A sample of compliments received in 2020/2021:

1. A young carer said of the social worker, ***'I would just like to say thank you so much for all your hard work throughout my assessment and really supporting and teaching me a lot of things to help with my sisters... I wish all you all the best. Thank you so much'***
2. A parent said of the social worker, ***'...I'd like to thank you Munn for all your efforts with X, your time and patience, your real understanding of getting to know X without pushing X or overwhelming X. You're truly very very important to us as a family I can honestly say even though there is still a long journey to understand X needs. I truly believe with your help and support we are going to get there now Munn your Effort to go back to the past and present must of took a lot of hard work from your end. The report was so focused on X I'm truly grateful to you for that and how comfortable X is speaking with you and that takes special skills. We truly value you and all your hard work with us so far so thank you again.'***
3. A young person said the social worker, ***'Ruth is one in a million, I can't believe that I am saying this about a social worker but I cannot fault her one bit. I felt safe enough to confide in her when my situation changed and I needed help ... She reassured me that she will find a good foster carer. She always keeps me informed of progress and sends me photos and videos. Ruth always goes that extra mile and her heart is in the right place. Ruth is a beautiful person and I know I can trust her.'***
4. A partner agency wrote in, ***'Thanking staff for support and updates on young person's case in court'***
5. A parent wrote to a social worker and said, ***"I just wanted to say hello and thank you. It was nothing urgent at all. I wanted to convey my gratitude for your support and kindness. I was feeling extremely grateful because none of the good would of happened without your expertise and experience. So thank you once more Jackie. You are a great asset to the team and we are so lucky you are allocated to us."***
6. The Youth Intervention Specialist from Health reported that a mother was singing the social workers praise, ***she said she was 'very grateful for the support as well as the professional network. She stated having Rochelle has been the best thing that has happened to her. She mentioned she wouldn't know what she would do without that support. She referred to the support from professionals including Lily-May as brilliant. In the past, she has had a breakdown as she hasn't had any support until recently. She expressed not understanding why people didn't value social services as they have helped her so much.***
7. Parents said of the Personalisation Officer, ***"...Gurpreet, you're not only always on top of your job, but also offer an excellent support, very understanding, approachable and most importantly compassionate. We are very lucky to have known you..."***
8. A child's Guardian said of the social worker, ***"Fantastic work Sian you are awesome to have moved her on like this."***
9. From a partner agency said of the social worker, ***"I felt compelled to let you know that your C&F report and referral to CAMHS were both great. I really appreciate the detail and thought you put into both and it has made my assessment and report writing much easier. So thank you!..."***
10. Foster carers said of a social worker, ***'You have been one of the most thorough and supportive social workers we have worked with as foster carers. ... you persisted with him and worked closely with us to turn it around and stabilise the situation. We have witnessed X on many occasions during his time with us try to manipulate the system and the professionals working with him and yet you have always been fair, straight and very supportive.***

