



Children's Social Care Annual Complaints Report 2022-2023

1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023

Safeguarding and Family Support

London Borough of Islington

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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 2022 and the 31 March 2023 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.

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.'

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

Stages of the complaint procedure

The statutory social care complaints procedure has three stages.

Stage 1 – Local Resolution (Problem Solving)

This is the most important stage of the complaint 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.

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 complaint 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.

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 decides 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.

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.

Overview

From 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 inclusive the department had 12,455 (12,199) contacts made to Children's Services Contact Team. As a comparison, the figure in brackets are the 2021/2022 data.

Of which in 2022/2023, there were as followed:

- 2019 (2203) Child & Family (Child in Need) Single Assessments completed
- 520 (543) children with 510 (550) periods of care Looked after Children throughout the year
- 914 (968) Children Looked After (CLA) reviews completed
- 839 (965) the number with an open referral Children in Need (CIN) cases (at year end)
- 169 (160) Child Protection cases (at year end)

In 2022/2023, the following communications were received from service users, parents, carers and/or their representatives:

- 45 compliments
- 5 representations
- 97 complaints
- 3 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
- Lack of support
- Assessment disagreement
- Information/communication

Of which, 31 (34%) - just over one-third of the 90 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

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 2022 to 31 March 2023 lessons have been learnt in a few cases of the complaints investigated.

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 2022/2023, with changes already made based upon the learning, followed by recommendations that staff have been asked to note.

Social work practice

- Reviewing the file and referral during the assessment and having follow up discussions while completing the assessment.
- Co-ordinate and link with services already involved and get information from them.

- The language used by professionals during CP conferences, particularly when detailing 'harm' and parenting can be difficult and challenging for parents to hear. This can cause engagement difficulties. Professionals need to use wording that carries the correct impact without causing embarrassment for the parent and/or possible alienation. Professionals who mispronounce a parent's name should correct this swiftly and apologetically if it is brought to their attention.
- The importance of ensuring enough time is set aside to spend with parents on assessments
- Needing to communicate changes etc with a parent despite being told that they don't want the updates.
- Parents must be consulted before children are sent on holiday with their carers
- The need to discuss all possible consequences when decisions around children's family care arrangements are being made when there is a history of domestic abuse.
- The need to outline the Permanence and Fostering assessment process, what is required and timescales. Any changes to this will be communicated in writing from now on (to applicants and CSWs) to prevent communication misunderstandings.
- Safety awareness of Social Workers around social media apps and how to best support YP in understanding these risks.
- That SW should complete the assessment noting difference of view from parent if attempts have been made to reach an agreement have not been successful.
- reading files properly and relaying information accurately between teams, before approaching families.
- Once the case is transferred to new workers, the expectations are aligned and not completely different from the previous workers

Customer care

- Clearer communication when a YPA is going on annual leave
- Social Workers should respond to phone calls/emails/texts from parents in a timely manner and ideally within 48 hours. Where a high level of correspondence is being sent, then a meeting should be set up with the parent to establish a working agreement about communication level and style.
- Responding to requests made via the generic fostering inbox is everyone's responsibility and responses should be timely. Upon exploration, it transpired that not all members of the team had access to this portal.

- SWs to alert parents of safeguarding concerns regarding their child immediately - unless it's a risk to the CLA placement or child's safety.
- To make sure there is good communication between the Permanence team and ALN.
- Improve communications with payments team so all non-payments and/or underpayments are identified and resolved quickly.

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:

Social work practice

- Management will make clear directions at the point of allocation around reviewing the file/any specific documents.
- Management will follow up on the file/information being reviewed in the initial supervisions.
- Improve communication and collaboration between all parties in the child/ren's care
- Transfer from assessment to support to include management oversight to ensure the carer experiences no less a service if their worker is off sick.
- Liaison with CEOP Ambassador who circulates up to date list of apps. This had stopped for a period but has now resumed – alongside exploitation team looking at ongoing training within the service around how to support YP safely access social media.
- Staff reminded about reading the file themselves rather than assume the contact team's email about a referral contains all relevant and necessary information
- Supervision order meetings to be chaired by Team Manager and be clear on expectations.

Customer care

- Template letter devised to share with carers to ensure they understand the process and expected associated timeframes.
- The whole team were given access to the team mailbox inbox. Refresher session in management meeting held about how to access this portal, responding to complaints in a timely manner and/or forwarding on to the correct team if misdirected. Responsibility for accessing this portal now forms part of the daily duty task to prevent anything being overlooked in future.

- Social Workers are required to communicate in an effective, positive manner when their child is looked after.
- Managers details to be provided to young person on allocation of new social worker or YPA, so that any concerns regarding lack of contact can be raised.
- Managers in ALN informed in writing that any queries related to finance for Islington adopters should automatically go to the Permanence Team Manager or the Service Manager to investigate and respond to.
- Importance of responding to emails in a timely manner, keeping all parties informed.

Compliments

Number of compliments

Table 1 shows the total number of compliments recorded in Safeguarding and Family Support Services from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 compared to the previous three years.

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

Year	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
Compliments	74	76	57	45

Compliments by period, service area and team

The volume of compliments received over the past four years has been varied, with the last two years seeing a reduction. The reduction is due to the Youth Offending Team no longer being within the Safeguarding and Family Support service.

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 taking the time to express gratitude and satisfaction 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 – a synopsis of the Compliments received.

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

Table 2a: Compliments by period and team – Children in Need

Teams	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
CSCT	1	0	2	1
Disabled Children's Team	1	2	6	2
EDT	0	0	2	0
Lough Road	5	11	9	5
Personalisation Team	0	4	2	0
Specialist Family Support	0	0	-	-
CIN Team 1 Barnsbury	2	3	1	1
CIN Team 2 Canonbury	3	1	2	0
CIN Team 3 Finsbury	5	0	2	2
CIN Team 4 Highbury	4	5	3	0
CIN Team 5 Hornsey	2	3	2	5

Teams	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
CIN Team 6 Holloway	4	2	1	2
Drug & Alcohol Service (IYPDAS)	0	0	-	-
YOS	21	15	-	-
Early Intervention Team	2	0	-	-
Families First	3	0	3	-
CIN Provider	3	0	-	1
Total	56	46	35	19

Table 2b: Compliments by period and teams – Children Looked After

Teams	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
CLA	0	1	1	0
Adoption	0	1	1	0
Contact Centre	0	0	0	0
Independent Futures	10	3	3	5
Family Plus (Permanence)	1	4	-	0
Fostering	0	1	4	10
CLA Team 1	1	10	6	2
CLA Team 2	0	4	1	2
Pause	-	-	1	3
Virtual School	0	1	2	1
Total	12	25	19	23

Table 2d: Compliments by period – Children Looked After - Placements Commissioning

Teams	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Business Support	1	1	-	0
Placements Commissioning	-	-	2	0
Total	1	1	2	0

Table 2e: Compliments by period – Children Looked After - Safeguarding & Quality Assurance

Teams	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Access to Records	4	2	-	0
CAIS	1	0	-	0
Child Protection Team	0	1	-	0
Complaints Team	0	0	-	0
Independent Reviewing Team	0	0	-	1
Family Group Conference	0	1	-	0
Anti-Bullying & DV Prevent	0	0	-	0

Teams	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
CSE/MISSING	0	0	-	0
Workforce Development	0	0	1	2
Total	5	4	1	3

Table 2f: Compliments by period – All services

Teams	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
All services	74	76	57	45

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 considered 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 complaint's procedure.

Number of representations

Table 3 shows the total number of new representations recorded in Safeguarding and Family Support Services from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 compared to the previous three years and the number of representations that escalated to a formal complaint.

Table 3: Representations

Year	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
Representations	8	9	7	5
Escalated to formal complaints procedure	0	0	2	2

In 2022/2023, the representations received were low, with 2 escalating to Stage 1 and then onto Stage 2 – Independent Investigation. Although the Department takes concerns raised seriously and take steps taken to successfully resolve these as early as possible, sometimes it's not enough for complainants.

Representations by period and service area

Table 4 shows a breakdown of representations recorded in Safeguarding and Family Support Services from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 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	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
Children in Need	4	7	6	2
Children Looked After	4	2	0	2
Targeted Services (Non CSC)	0	0	1	1
Total no. of representations	8	9	7	5

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 2022/2023, the number of new Stage 1 complaints received across the council was 3409 compared to 3015 in the previous year. This is an increase of 13%.

Table 5 shows the total number of new Stage 1 complaints recorded in the council from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, compared to the previous three years.

Table 5: Number of complaints recorded in Islington by period

Year	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
Number of complaints	2529	2433	3015	3409

Table 6 shows the total number of new complaints recorded in Safeguarding and Family Support from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, compared to the previous nine years.

Table 6: Number of complaints recorded in SFS by period

13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23
61	90	98	104	85	81	102	96	98	97

In 2022/2023, the number of complaints received in Safeguarding and Family Support reduced by 1% in comparison to 2021/2022. The number of complaints received is lower than in previous years; however, not too dissimilar to previous years, despite the increase in the number of contacts made to the department.

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

Complaints compared to compliments

Table 7 shows the total number of complaints recorded in Safeguarding and Family Support from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, compared to the total number of compliments recorded and gives a comparison to the previous three years.

Table 7: Number of complaints and compliments recorded in SFS

Year	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
Complaints	102	96	98	97
Compliments	74	76	57	45

Complaints by procedure

Table 8 shows the distribution of complaints recorded in Safeguarding and Family Support from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 by complaints procedure and gives a comparison to the previous three years.

Table 8: Complaints by procedure

Year	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
Statutory complaints	85	86	91	84
Corporate complaints	17	10	7	13
Total	102	96	98	97

In 2022/2023 of the 97 complaints recorded during this period, 84 were dealt with under the statutory social care complaint procedure and 13 dealt with under the council's complaint procedure.

Complaints by period and stage

Table 9 shows the total number of complaints recorded in Safeguarding and Family Support from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 by the stage of the complaint and gives a comparison to the previous three years.

Table 9: Number of complaints by period and stage

Year	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
Stage 1 complaints	99	92	94	90
Stage 2/CE complaints	2	3	2	6
Stage 3 complaints	1	1	2	1
Total	102	96	98	97

In 2022/2023 of the complaints received, 90 were investigated at Stage 1 of the statutory children’s social care complaints procedure, 6 escalated to Stage 2/CE stage and 1 complaint escalated through to Stage 3 – Review Panel hearing.

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

Complaints by service area, team and stage

Tables 10 to 14 show the total number of complaints recorded in Safeguarding and Family Support from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 by service area, team and stage, compared with the previous three years.

Table 10: Children in Need

Year	2019/2020			2020/2021			2021/2022			2022/2023		
	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3
CIN Team 1 Barnsbury	6	0	1	3	0	0	9	1	0	7	1	0

Year	2019/2020			2020/2021			2021/2022			2022/2023		
CIN Team 2 Canonbury	10	0	0	5	0	0	6	0	0	2	0	0
CIN Team 3 Finsbury	0	0	0	3	0	0	12	0	0	6	0	0
CIN Team 4 Highbury	11	0	0	7	1	1	3	0	0	4	0	0
CIN Team 5 Hornsey	4	0	0	2	0	0	7	1	0	6	1	0
CIN Team 6 Holloway	2	0	0	8	0	0	3	0	0	2	0	1
CSCT	5	0	0	3	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0
Disabled Children's Service	11	1	0	7	0	0	8	0	0	12	1	0
Emergency Duty Team	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Lough Road	1	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
CIN Provider	3	0	0	1	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
Children in Need	53	1	1	42	1	1	54	2	0	42	3	1
TOTAL	55			44			56			46		

Table 11: Children Looked After

Year	2019/2020			2020/2021			2021/2022			2022/2023		
Stage	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3
Virtual School	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0

Year	2019/2020			2020/2021			2021/2022			2022/2023		
Adoption	4	0	0	4	0	0	3	0	0	3	0	0
CLA Team 1	14	0	0	11	0	0	10	0	0	14	1	0
CLA Team 2	6	0	0	11	1	0	3	0	1	6	0	0
CLA Team 3	1	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Contact Centre	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Family Plus (Permanence)	4	0	0	2	0	0	4	0	0	3	1	0
Fostering	3	0	0	3	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Historical CLA	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Independent Futures	9	0	0	18	1	0	15	0	1	17	1	0
Pause	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Children Looked After	43	0	0	49	2	0	38	0	2	45	3	0
TOTAL	43			51			40			48		

Following a reorganisation in 2020 - CLA Team 3 is no longer part of the CLA service.

Table 12: Information and Commissioning

Year	2019/2020			2020/2021			2021/2022			2022/2023		
Stage	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3
Business Support	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Placements commissioning	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Placements Commissioning	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
TOTAL	3			0			0			1		

Table 13: Safeguarding and Quality Assurance

Year	2019/2020			2020/2021			2021/2022			2022/2023		
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	0	0	0
Child Protection	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
Customer Care & Complaints	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Independent Reviewing Team	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0
S&QA	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0

Year	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
TOTAL	1	1	2	2

Table 14: Totals

Year	2019/2020			2020/2021			2021/2022			2022/2023		
Stage	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3	S1	S2	S3
Children in Need	53	1	1	42	1	1	54	2	0	42	3	1
Children Looked After	43	0	0	49	2	0	38	0	2	45	3	0
Information and Commissioning	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	1	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sub-total	99	1	1	92	3	1	94	2	2	90	6	1
TOTAL	101			96			98			97		

Of all of CIN teams, the Disabled Children’s Team (DCT) received the highest number of complaints for the first time in the last three years.

In 2022/2023 CIN DCT received 12 complaints, which was a significant increase on the previous year; however, half of these complaints relate to two families who have logged numerous separate complaints over the year. It is also worth noting that DCT, unlike the other teams, assess and provide financial resource to families; in the cost-of-living crisis we have observed families requesting an increase in their allocated resources via the complaints process, despite acknowledging that they had a positive experience of their allocated social worker and that the assessment itself was accurate. Also, the service complete financial assessments using the Council’s Resource Allocation Support System (RAS) that some parents do not always agree with.

Of the 12 complaints received in CIN DCT in 2022/2023:

- 2 (17%) complaints were in relation to lack of support
- 2 (17%) complaint was in relation to an assessment disagreement
- 2 (17%) complaints were in relation to finance
- 2 (17%) complaints were in relation to the placement
- 1 (8%) complaint was in relation to the conduct and/or attitude of staff
- 1 (8%) complaint was in relation to delay in a reassessment
- 1 (8%) complaint was in relation to the postponement of a Review Child Protection Conference
- 1 (8%) complaint was in relation to communication/information issue

Of the 12 complaints received - 3 (25%) were partially upheld following investigation 8 (67%) were not upheld, and 1 (8%) was withdrawn, as the complainant no longer wished to pursue the complaint.

Of all the CLA teams, Independent Futures received 17 complaints. This is a slight increase on the previous year. Part of the reason for the slight increase in complaints from 2021/22 may be due to a focus on ending involvement with young people over 21 who were not fully engaging with the service or assessed as no longer requiring a service from Independent Futures. Independent Futures work with 600 young people, which is almost double the amount of young people that CLA service works with. In addition, the young people that Independent Futures support are encouraged to make use of advocates to support them, and often they support young people to make complaints.

Of the 17 complaints received in Independent Futures in 2022/2023:

- 5 (29%) complaints were in relation to the conduct and/or attitude of staff
- 3 (18%) complaints were in relation to placement/accommodation issues
- 3 (18%) complaints were in relation to lack of support issues
- 2 (12%) complaints were in relation to quality-of-service issues
- 2 (12%) complaints were in relation to no response to previous communication
- 1 (6%) complaint was in relation to finance concerns
- 1 (6%) complaint was in relation to assessment disagreement issues

Of the 17 complaints received in Independent Futures in 2022/2023, 1 (6%) complaint was upheld following investigation, 3 (18%) were partially upheld, 12 (71%) were not upheld and 1 (6%) no action was taken on it, as it was out of time.

Complaints by subject category

Table 15 shows the total number of complaints recorded in Safeguarding and Family Support from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 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 conduct and/or attitude of staff are sometimes interconnected with information/communication complaints.

Table 15: Number of SFS complaints recorded in last 3 years by subject category

Complaint subject	2020/21 Number	2020/21 %	2021/22 Number	2021/22 %	2022/23 Number	2022/23 %
Quality of assessment	0	0%	0	0%	1	1%
Assessment disagreement	9	9%	15	16%	9	9%
Conduct and/or attitude of staff	32	33%	20	21%	30	31%
Contact	4	4%	2	2%	2	2%
Finance	3	3%	4	4%	5	5%
Support Disagreement	0	0%	2	2%	0	0%
Information/ communication	12	13%	22	22%	9	9%

Complaint subject	2020/21 Number	2020/21 %	2021/22 Number	2021/22 %	2022/23 Number	2022/23 %
incl. data protection						
Lack of Support	1	1%	11	11%	13	13%
No response to previous communication	0	0%	1	1%	7	7%
Placement issues	13	14%	11	11%	6	6%
Quality of service	15	16%	2	2%	8	8%
Service delay	1	1%	4	4%	3	3%
Support disagreement	2	2%	2	2%	1	1%
Other (including lost belongings, Housing)	4	4%	2	2%	3	3%
Total	96	100%	98	100%	97	100%

Whilst numbers for complaints in individual categories are small, it is important to examine the areas where we receive the most complaints to learn. The two highest subject categories were 'Conduct and/or attitude of staff', which has increased significantly from 20 (21%); complaints to 30 (31%); then 'Lack of Support', which also increased, from 11 (11%) complaints to 13 (13%).

The two categories make up 43 (44%) of all complaints received.

- 'Conduct and/or attitude of staff' = 30 (31%) complaints: Of which 2 (7%) complaints were upheld, 12 (40%) complaints were partially upheld (partially founded), 8 (27%) complaints were not upheld (unfounded), 7 (23%) complaints were NFA (no further action), as the matters were in court/out of time and 1 (3%) complaint was withdrawn.

- 'Lack of support' = 13 (13%) complaints: Of which 1 (8%) complaint received was upheld, 3 (23%) complaints were partially upheld, and 9 (69%) complaints were not upheld.

In the two categories that featured most highly, 18 (41%) of the complaints were justified, being upheld or partially upheld.

Complaints by outcome

Table 16 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 16: Stage 1 complaints by outcome

Year	Upheld	Partially Upheld	Not Upheld	Other	Total no. of complaints
2019/2020	11 (11%)	25 (25%)	51 (52%)	12 (12%)	99 (100%)
2020/2021	8 (9%)	24 (26%)	53 (58%)	7 (8%)	92 (100%)
2021/2022	14 (15%)	22 (23%)	48 (51%)	10 (11%)	94 (100%)
2022/2023	9 (10%)	22 (24%)	42 (47%)	17 (19%)	90 (100%)

In 2022/2023, of the 90 Stage 1 complaints received 9 (10%) were upheld, 22 (24%) were partially upheld and 42 (47%) were not upheld.

Therefore, 31 (34%) of the complaints investigated were upheld (justified) in full or in part and 59 (66%) were not upheld/other. This is not dissimilar to the previous three years.

In 2022/2023 of the 6 - Stage 2 complaints received, 2 (33%) were partially upheld, 3 (50%) were not upheld and 1 (17%) the investigation was stopped, due to the unreasonable behaviour of the complainant. The 1 (100%) - Stage 3 complaint received was not upheld.

Timeliness of complaint responses

The council's objective is that 95% of all new complaints are responded to within the target timescale.

The complexity of the statutory complaints received has an associated impact on achievability of responding to complaints within the set timescales.

Stage 1 complaints

Table 17 shows the total number of Stage 1 complaints recorded in Safeguarding and Family Support Services from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, in relation to the timeliness of the complaint responses, compared with the previous three years.

Table 17: Timeliness of Stage 1 complaint responses

Year	Timescale met	Timescale not met	Other (i.e., withdrawn)	Total no. of complaints
2019/2020	71 (72%)	18 (18%)	10 (10%)	99 (100%)
2020/2021	52 (57%)	37 (40%)	3 (3%)	92 (100%)
2021/2022	75 (80%)	17 (18%)	2 (2%)	94 (100%)
2022/2023	78 (87%)	12 (13%)	0 (0%)	90 (100%)

NB. Stage 1 complaints responded to within 10/20 working days are included as being within timescale.

In 2022/2023, 78 of the 90 Stage 1 complaints received and completed by the department were responded to within the relevant timescale, meaning we achieved 87% compliance. This is an improvement on the previous year, as in comparison, in 2021/2022, 75 of the 94 Stage 1 complaints received and completed by the department were responded to within the relevant timescale, meaning we achieved 80% compliance. The improvement in compliance is possibly due to continued hybrid working. Possibly an amalgamation of different things - with Microsoft Teams meetings are easier to arrange and so happen sooner; taking complaints a little more serious than before, a happier, more contented workforce.

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.

Stage 2 complaints

Table 18 shows the total number of Stage 2 complaints received in Safeguarding and Family Support Services from 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, in relation to the timeliness of the complaint response, compared to the previous three years.

Table 18: Timeliness of Stage 2 complaint responses

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

Year	Timescale met	Timescale not met	Total no. of complaints
2020/2021	2 (67%)	1 (33%)	3 (100%)
2021/2022	0 (0%)	2 (100%)	2 (100%)
2022/2023	4 (67%)	2 (33%)	6 (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.

Of the 6 Stage 2/CE complaints received from the 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, 4 (67%) were dealt with under the statutory social care complaints procedure and 2 (33%) under the Council complaints procedure. Of which, the 4 (67%) complaints dealt with by the Safeguarding and Family Support, Customer Care and Complaints Team were responded to within the given timescale. The 2 (33%) complaints dealt with by the Central Complaints Team, were dealt with out of timescale, which was due to their backlog of CE complaints at the time. However, at the time of writing this report, I understand that backlog has since been successfully cleared.

Stage 3 complaints

Table 19 shows the total number of Stage 3 complaints received in Safeguarding and Family Support Services from 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, in relation to the timeliness of the complaint response, compared to the previous three years.

Table 19: Timeliness of Stage 3 complaint responses

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

Year	Timescale met	Timescale not met	Total no. of complaints
2021/2022	2 (100%)	0 (0%)	2 (100%)
2022/2023	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)

The 1 Stage 3 complaint received from the 1 April 2022 to the 31 March 2023 was dealt with under the statutory social care complaints procedure and within the timescales set out on the statutory regulations.

Complaints by relationship to the service user

Table 20 shows a breakdown of complaints recorded in Safeguarding and Family Support from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 by relationship to the service user, compared to the three previous years.

Table 20: Complaints by relationship to the service user

Year	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
Advocate	9	15	12	13
Child in need	0	1	1	0
Child/young person being looked after	2	2	1	0
Child leaving care	3	1	5	5
Parent	68	65	67	67

Year	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
Foster carer	2	5	5	5
Persons with sufficient interest in the child's welfare	12	4	5	3
Partner agency	0	0	0	1
Other	6	3	2	3
Total	102	96	98	97

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

In 2022/2023 'Advocate', including solicitors was the second highest category with 13 (13%) complaints and a reduction on the previous year. Of the 13 complaints received from advocates, 10 (76%) 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.

Complaints by ethnicity with comparative data

Table 21 shows the number of complaints recorded in Safeguarding and Family Support from 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023 by ethnicity, with comparative data.

Table 21: Complaints by ethnicity with comparative data

	Complaints in 2022/2023	% of complaints in 2022/2023	% of service users 2022/2023	Islington's Child population*
White British	21	22%	22.8%	25.7%

	Complaints in 2022/2023	% of complaints in 2022/2023	% of service users 2022/2023	Islington's Child population*
White Irish	3	3%	1.3%	
White Other	4	4%	8.6%	13.1%
Total - White	28	29%	32.7%	38.8%
Mixed White & Black Caribbean	3	3%	5.3%	4.2%
Mixed White & Black African	2	2%	1.6%	-
Mixed White & Asian	0	0%	0.8%	-
Mixed British	0	0%		-
Mixed Other	0	0%	14%	14.0%
Mixed Not Stated/Unknown	15	15%	-	-
Total - Mixed	20	21%	21.7%	18.2%
Indian	0		0.5%	-
Pakistani	3	3%	0.8%	-
Bangladeshi	1	1%	3.4%	6.2%
Other Asian	2	2%	2.2%	2.2%

	Complaints in 2022/2023	% of complaints in 2022/2023	% of service users 2022/2023	Islington's Child population*
Asian / Asian British	0			
Total - Asian	6	6%	6.9%	8.4%
Caribbean	10	10%	7.9%	4.6%
African	3	3%	8.1%	10.0%
Black British Caribbean	4	4%	-	-
Black British African	15	15%	-	-
Other Black	3	3%	14.2%	1.9%
Other Black British	0	0%		
Total - Black	35	36%	30.2%	16.5%
Not Stated / Unknown	8	8%	3.3%	
Other	0	0%	5.2%	18.3%
TOTAL	97	100%	100%	100%

NB. *Islington Population (0-17 Years) source: January 2023 - Early Years and School Censuses

In 2022/2023 the ethnic profile of complainants to service user population.

Complaint by source

Table 22 shows the number of complaints received in Safeguarding and Family Support from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 by the source. It is evident that the majority 88 (91%) of complainants prefer to communicate with the department in the first instance via email.

Table 22: Complaints by source

Source	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
Contact Form	13	3	7	5
Email	75	89	87	88
In Person	3	0	0	0
Letter	6	1	0	1
LGSCO	1	0	0	0
Telephone	4	2	4	3
Text Message	0	1	0	0
Total	102	96	98	97

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

Table 23 shows the total number of new LGSCO enquiries and complaints received in Safeguarding and Family Support from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023, compared to the previous three years.

Table 23: Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman enquiries and complaints

Year	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
Notice	0	0	0	0
Enquiries	1	4	0	0
Complaints	2	2	0	3
Other (i.e. outside jurisdiction)	0	0	0	0
Total	3	6	0	3

In 2022/2023 there were 3 LGSCO complaints received in children social care. All 3 complaints the LGSCO closed after deciding not to investigate and take any further action. This is testament to the effective, robust complaints investigations being carried out within Safeguarding and Family Support at the internal 3-stages of the complaints process.

Cost

Stage 2 and Stage 3 complaints independent (external) people

Table 24 shows a breakdown of the cost in delivering the statutory social care complaints process in Safeguarding and Family Support from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 and gives a comparison to the previous three years.

Table 24: Cost of Stage 2 and Stage 3 complaints

Year	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
Investigating Officers	£159.20	£4800.94	£6500.45	£4782.30
Independent Persons	£501.80	£1610.00	£2012.50	£2150.00
Review Panellists	£1876.10	£1697.50	£2437.50	£1950.00
Total	£2537.10	£8108.44	£10,950.45	£8882.30

Compensation/ex-gratia payments

Table 25 shows a breakdown of compensation/ex-gratia payments made by Safeguarding and Family Support from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 in relation to complaints.

Year	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
Stage 1 complaints	£5458.00	£17,900.00	£14,605.00	£750.00
Stage 2 complaints	£0	£0	£450.00	£2000.00
Stage 3 complaints	£0	£0	£1500.00	£300.00

Year	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
Stage 4 - LGSCO	£0	£0	£0	£0
Total	£5458.00	£17,900.00	£16,555.00	£3050.00

If it is appropriate to do so, compensation is offered and paid at Stage 1 of the complaints process.

In 2022/2023, the compensation was offered in relation to 7 complaints. Of which, 2 complaints were at Stage 1 of the complaints process, 4 at Stage 2 and 1 at Stage 3. With 6 complaints being from the CIN Service (Barnsbury x2, Canonbury, Holloway, Hornsey, DCT teams) and 1 complaint from the CLA – Permanence and Fostering team.

The amounts paid varied and were made as goodwill gestures, and in some cases were payments due to complaints upheld or partially upheld, delay within the complaints process, the stress caused, time and trouble for pursuing their complaint etc. Two complainants were each offered £1000 pounds each. One from CIN Barnsbury and the other CIN Holloway for complaints for the aforementioned reasons.

London complaints network

The Children's Customer Care and Complaints Manager continues to work with colleagues from the London Complaints Managers group, meeting quarterly 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. Since the 1 April 2020 the work of this group has been solely online and virtual via Microsoft Teams.

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, the number of complaints received 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 significantly higher than previous years, increasing to 13 (13%) from 7 (7%) in the previous year – 2021/2022, which is fortunately not reflected in the same way within Safeguarding and Family Support as there was only a 1% increase in the number of 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; however, this is not always possible to prevent due to the nature of the complaints received.

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 continue to feature high on their list of priorities.

Moving forward - 2023/2024

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, made 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 – 2023/2024 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 continue to encourage managers to consider the benefits of virtual and/or face-to-face discussions (Resolution Meetings) when investigating complaints
- The Customer Care and Complaints Manager and line managers where required to continue to support individual members of staff during the complaint investigation process, as it can sometimes 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
- The Customer Care and Complaints Manager will work with the Council's change team to review how the Council as a whole receive and handle complaints, with the view of commissioning a new complaints electronic database
- Aim to reduce the number of complaint escalations, thereby reducing overall cost to the Council
- Continue to 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 take steps to remind their customers of how to provide feedback, and actively promote this through all their interaction with customers.

Appendix 1 - Compliments

A sample of compliments received in 2022/2023:

- A foster carer said of the social worker: We have been lucky to have had some amazing social workers /SSW who have supported us on our journey. The Virtual school have also provided any extra support, materials and tuition needed too.
- A Guardian ad Litem said of a social worker: I wanted to mention how impressed I have been at the dedication and commitment of the allocated social worker
- A carer said to a social worker: I have just read through the pathway plan. It's PERFECT! you have done such an amazing job in collating the information and covering every aspect of T's life CORRECTLY! This is a great piece of work that is clear, accurate and well written.
- A Judge commended the social workers: ...for the "sensitive and dynamic" work undertaken with the family, so well done all.
- A Psychoanalytic Child and Adolescent Psychotherapist said of the social Worker: I just wanted to let you know how impressed I have been with L's work, particularly in bringing together and collaborating with the network...
- A parent wrote to a social worker and said: Thanks for the caring prompt reply, you are a lovely person.
- A carer said to a supervising social worker: ...has been wonderful in all the years she has been my SSW. She has been so supportive and always available whenever I need her
- A mother said of the Independent Reviewing Officer: 'Thank you for having discussed the PIP situation with the LA... She told me she was impressed with how you conducted last week's meeting and I'm lucky to have you advocating ...
- A college Safeguarding Lead and Lead Learning Assistant said of CSCT: Islington CSC is very positive and mutually supportive
- A child's Guardian said of the social worker: The Judge acknowledges K's skilled social work practice. It is my view that K worked exceptionally hard in a difficult case. K was fair, balanced and her final written and oral evidence was excellent.
- A service user said of the social worker: I just wanted to take a moment to send compliments to AH work. I understand that he is new but is doing an excellent job. He sticks to his word. Is effective and efficient. He even goes above and beyond what I have asked of him.

- A parent sent a greetings card to a PAUSE Practitioner: I want to thank you for all the support you've given me and my mother, although I am not someone you're suppose to support you're still given me plenty help....'.