



Feedback and complaints in Children's Services





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Introduction

This leaflet gives you information on how to give feedback or complain about Children's Services.

Children's Services aim to provide a quality service to children and young people living in East Sussex and welcomes their views – and the views of adults acting in their best interests – about the services provided. There may be times when children and young people and those acting in their best interests are not happy with services and want to let us know about this, or make a complaint. Your feedback highlights areas where we have not met your expectations, and where improvement may be needed. Compliments are also important as these help inform the development of services and show where we are getting it right.

You can be assured that the service you receive will not be prejudiced by any negative feedback or complaint you make. Our aim is to work with you in order to sort out your complaint and, where necessary, improve our services and practices.

Any information given will be treated confidentially and with respect. It will only be shared on a 'need-to-know' basis. Sometimes your feedback or complaint may involve Children's Services and another agency, like a health authority or the police. When this happens we will talk to the other agency to make sure we reply to you with one response wherever possible. If this is not possible, we will let you know. We will store and process your information in line with our published privacy and information governance policies.

Information about how we handle your data is available on our website: www.eastsussex.gov.uk

The Complaints Procedure

For complaints about all Children's Services

Complaints about **children's social care** services follow a three stage statutory procedure as laid out in The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006.

If your complaint is about a Child Protection Conference, please refer to the leaflet 'Making a Complaint about a Child Protection Conference'. These are available from the Complaints Team or Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Team. All other complaints about Children's Services follow a one stage procedure.

If you need support to make your complaint, please contact the Customer Relations Team who can give further advice regarding independent advocacy services. Their contact details are at the back of this leaflet.

Complaints about **schools** must be made directly to the school. All schools are required to have their own published complaints process which is often available on their website. For your school's contact details please visit www.eastsussex.gov.uk/findaschool

You may also complain directly to Ofsted if there's a problem that affects the whole school – this includes problems with the quality of education or poor management.

NB: Relevant contact numbers are at the end of this leaflet.

Stage 1

If you are not happy about the service you received, in the first instance please talk to the team manager. Alternatively you can contact the Customer Relations Team. In all cases, we will try to resolve the problem as quickly as we can. This will normally be within 10 working days, although there are times when we may need to extend the timescale to 20 working days.

The majority of complaints are resolved at Stage 1.

Stage 2

(this stage applies to children's social care complaints only)

If you are not satisfied after attempting to resolve your complaint at Stage 1 and you want your complaint to be investigated further, write to the Complaints Manager giving your reasons why. This should include anything you feel has not been adequately addressed at Stage 1 and should confirm the outcomes you are looking for as a result of making the complaint. You should do this within 20 working days of receiving the first response. If you need help with writing your complaint, speak with the Complaints Manager.

An acknowledgement will be sent to you within three working days and the Complaints Manager will review the complaint and discuss what else can be done to try and resolve it. He or she will advise you whether your complaint can be taken to Stage 2. If progressed, the Complaints Manager will appoint an Investigating Officer to look into your complaint. The Investigating Officer will not have been responsible for the service that you are complaining about.

The Complaints Manager will also appoint an Independent Person (someone who is not part of the council) to work alongside the Investigating Officer.

At the end of the investigation, both the Investigating Officer and the Independent Person will write reports. Using these reports, a senior manager will make a decision based on their findings about what should be done as a result of the findings.

The investigation into your complaint and the senior manager's response to you should happen within 25 working days from the date you agree your statement of complaint with the Investigating Officer. This can be extended to 65 working days if your complaint is complex or if there are other reasons for the investigation taking longer. The Investigating Officer will talk to you about extending the timescale.

You will normally be sent the investigation report and the Independent Person's report along with the senior manager's response. The senior manager will offer to meet with you to discuss the reports and the response. You will also be told how to take your complaint further if you are still not satisfied.

Stage 3

(this stage applies to children's social care complaints only)

If you are not satisfied with Stage 2, you can make a request for a review panel to hear your complaint. You must contact the Complaints Manager within 20 working days of receiving the senior manager's letter. The Complaints Manager will discuss with you your reasons for asking for a review panel and if there is anything else that could be done to resolve your complaint. If there is nothing further that can be done, the Complaints Manager will advise you if it is appropriate to take your complaint to Stage 3. If a Stage 3 is agreed, the Complaints Manager will set up a review panel to meet within 30 working days of receiving your request. The Complaints Manager will keep you fully informed about this part of the process.

The panel will be made up of three independent people, one of whom will be designated chair of the panel meeting. None of the panel members or the chair will have had any previous knowledge or involvement in your complaint.

The panel chair will write a report, giving the panel's recommendations and the reasons for them, which will be sent to you within five working days of the meeting. The report is also sent to the Director of Children's Services and to those who took part in the meeting. The Director will write to you within 15 working days of receiving the review panel report to advise you of the Local Authority's response to the report.

Learning

We acknowledge that we cannot change the past, but in addition to doing what we can to try and resolve your complaint, we will also look at how we can learn from the feedback you have given us and ensure our services are improved as a result.

All compliments, general feedback and complaints are logged and an annual report is produced highlighting where we are performing well and where improvement may be needed. This report is shared publicly on our website and internally with managers to ensure we are sharing lessons we have learned and encouraging continual improvement in the services we deliver.



Local Government Ombudsman

For children’s social care complaints – If after Stage 3 you are not satisfied with the Director’s response, you can refer your complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman. The Ombudsman’s address is at the end of this leaflet.

For complaints about all other Children’s Services – If after Stage 1, you are not satisfied with the response to your complaint, you can refer your complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman. The Ombudsman’s address is at the end of this leaflet.

Exceptions and special circumstances

Sometimes we may need to vary the complaints procedure for the following reasons:

- Staff disciplinary procedures apply.
- A police criminal investigation is being conducted.
- A child protection investigation is being conducted.
- A legal process – such as applying for a court order or a legal claim for negligence has been made against us.
- Your complaint has been made later than one year after the grounds to complain arose and there is no good reason for the delay in making it.
- The procedure may compromise a legal process or a statutory appeals process.

When this happens, we will suspend the complaints procedure and advise you of this.

We will not look into complaints that are repetitive, anonymous, malicious, or have previously been addressed through legal proceedings.

Feedback

There may be times when you don't want to complain, but you do want us to know what you think about our services. You can do this by contacting the service manager or the Complaints Team. We will take your feedback on board and reply to you if appropriate.

Compliments

We also welcome compliments. If you are pleased with the services you have received and you think that they have made a difference, please let the service manager or the Complaints Team know.



Contact details

The easiest way to give feedback or make a complaint is via our website. Please visit: **www.eastsussex.gov.uk/CSFeedback**

You can also phone, text or write to the Customer Relations Team at:

Children's Services Customer Relations Team

East Sussex County Council
County Hall
PO Box 4
St Anne's Crescent
Lewes
East Sussex
BN7 1SG

Phone: 0345 60 80 192

Textphone: 07797 878888



Scan here with your smartphone to contact us online



Other useful contacts

Safeguarding & Quality Assurance

Phone: 01323 466606

Email: cpconferencingservice@eastsussex.gov.uk

Ofsted

Phone: 0300 1234 234

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

CGL Advocacy for Young People

Phone or text: 0300 303 9649

Web: www.changegrowlive.org

Local Government Ombudsman

PO Box 4771

Coventry

CV4 0EH

Phone: 0300 061 0614

Web: www.lgo.org.uk



**Please contact the Customer Relations Team
if you need this information in Braille,
large print or another language.**