



I want to make
a complaint.

A Guide to Making a Complaint About Children's Social Care Services



Introduction

This guide explains what you can do if you have a complaint about Children's Social Care Services. You may want to make a complaint because:

- You are unhappy about decisions that have been made about your care
- You think that no one is listening to you
- You feel that you are not being treated properly by the people involved in your care
- You have an idea or feedback about how the service could work better

Making a complaint might solve the issue, tell you why something might have happened, or let you know something that was said. Sharing your experience with Children's Social Care can also help them to make things better for other people.

This step-by-step guide will show you how to make a complaint. It gives you the information you need, explains your choices, and how you can help. It can also help you feel more confident about speaking up.

In this guide you will find information and tips that you can look back at, while going through the complaints process.

How Advocacy Focus can help you with your complaint

Advocacy Focus is an independent, free, and confidential service. This service is there to support **Children and Young People** who might need some help making a complaint.

Your Advocate can:

- Provide a confidential, independent, and safe space for you to discuss your complaint
- Help you understand the various stages of the complaints process
- Help you to write letters
- Support you to attend meetings
- Support you to take things further if you are unhappy with the response you have been given

It's important to know that your Advocate cannot tell you what to do or make decisions for you. They will give you information and options, not their own opinions. You can get support by phone, email, in person, or through a video call at any stage of your complaint.

Our details are:

Advocacy Focus

Saturn House

Mercury Rise

Altham Business Park

BB5 5BY

Telephone: 0300 323 0965

Text: 07886 744 634

Email: admin@advocacyfocus.org.uk

Complaint Stages: What to Expect

When making a complaint to Children's Social Care there are three stages. All councils have their own policies and procedures, but there are strict timescales for them to get back to you at each stage.

Stage 1

Your complaint will be sent to the team you are making a complaint about. This usually goes to the team manager who will try to resolve the complaint. They should send you a response within 10 working days. If they need more time, they will usually tell you and ask you if this is okay.

Timescale: **10 days**

Stage 2

If you are unhappy with the response at Stage 1, you can let the Complaints Team know and ask them to look at your complaint under Stage 2 of the process. The Complaints Officer will ask an independent person to look into your complaint. This is usually someone from a different team in the council. Sometimes they do not work for the council at all. This should not take more than 25 working days.

Timescale: **No more than 25 days**

Stage 3

If you are still unhappy and do not feel that your complaint has been resolved, you can ask for a review panel to look at your complaint. A review panel is a group of independent people who will look at your complaint and the responses you have received. They will ask you what you are still unhappy about, and then they will make a decision.


Timescale: **No more than 65 days**

Before you make your complaint

What are you unhappy about?

It is important to take time to think about what your complaint is about. This could be a single issue, or several things about your care.

Use the space below to write down what your complaint is about:

Before you make your complaint








What do you want to happen?

It is important to think about what it is you want to happen as a result of your complaint. This will depend on what matters to you. You might want something to change in your life, to tell people how you are feeling, or you might not want what happened to you to happen to anyone else. You might also have questions that you want people to answer. This is an important part of your complaint, so take some time to think about this.

When you make a complaint, some things you might get are:

- An explanation
- An apology
- Changes to rules or procedures

Use the space below to write down what you would like to happen:

Making a Complaint

There are several ways to complain. If you feel comfortable you can **speak to a member of staff or their manager directly**. This is usually the quickest way to solve a problem.

You can speak to your Social Worker about how to make the complaint or ask what St Helens Council's policy is for complaints. They must then let you know how to do this.

Ways to make your complaint:

- Talk to someone – you might want to talk to the person that you are unhappy with or their manager. If you want to talk to someone else about your complaint, you can contact 01744 676789.
- Have a meeting to talk about the complaint (informal meeting). This might be with your Social Worker or their manager, or you might want to speak to someone else.
- Fill in a form online: www.sthelens.gov.uk/article/5569/Make-a-complaint
- Email childrenscomplaints@sthelens.gov.uk
- Write a complaint letter and send it to:

St Helens Borough Council Contact Centre,
Wesley House,
Corporation Street,
St Helens,
WA10 1HF

Template Complaint Letter

If you decide to write a complaint letter, it's a good idea to keep a copy of everything you send so you can refer to it later.

The following template is just a guide – the text in yellow is for you to change. You may not need to include all the information – it depends on what you want to complain about.

You could just send a couple of sentences to say why you are complaining, but the complaints team may ask you for more information.

Your Name
Your Address
Your Mobile Number
Your Email Address

The Complaints Manager
Name of the organisation or trust
Address of the organisation

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

To Whom It May Concern (or Dear [Name] if you know it),

I am writing to complain about the treatment I received from [name of the person] at [where it happened] on [when it happened].

- Put bullet points here, or a paragraph about what happened, when and where. The more information you give, the easier it will be for the Complaints Team to look at your complaint.

Say what you have done, if anything, to try and solve the problem already. For example, this could be that you have spoken to someone about it. Try to include dates, names, and locations where you can.

Template Complaint Letter

I would like you to respond to the following points of my complaint:

1. Put here everything that you are unhappy with, with the most important thing first.
- 2.
- 3.

In your response, I would like you to answer the following questions I have:

1. Here you should ask the questions you want answered, if you have any.
- 2.

As a result of this complaint, I would now like (this is where you put what you want to happen):

For example:

1. An explanation of what happened and why
2. An apology
3. Action to solve the problem or change things so that this does not happen again in the future

Yours sincerely or Yours faithfully

Use 'Yours sincerely' if you know the name of the person you are writing to, and 'Yours faithfully' if you do not.

Your signature

Print your name

You might want other people, such as your Advocate, to get a copy of the response too. If so, add their information here:

cc. [Name]

[Name of service and address here]

What happens next?

Once you have sent your complaint, you should get an email, letter, or a call to say that they have received this. Sometimes they will give you an idea as to how quickly this might be dealt with and when you should get a reply.

By the end of the deadline (see above timescales), you should get a response to your complaint letter. The response should address the things you've raised and tell you if they can give you the outcomes you have asked for. If you don't receive a response by the timescale date, it's okay to send another letter or make a follow up phone call.

If you do not agree with the response you get, you can ask for a meeting with the people involved or ask the complaints department to move on to the next stage. The response letter should also tell you what you can do next if you are still unhappy.

You can go through each stage as stated above. After the second and third stage, if you are still unhappy about the responses you have received and how your complaint has been investigated, you have one other option. You can ask the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman to look at your complaint.

The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

The Local Government Ombudsman is the last step for complaints about Councils. They manage complaints about children's social care.

The LGO say that you should complete all stages of the council's complaints process first. If your complaint hasn't been resolved, or you haven't received a response in a reasonable amount of time, you can take your complaint to the LGO.

You need to send your complaint to them no later than one year after the event or incident you are complaining about, or from when you first became aware of the issue. There are some exceptions to this rule, such as if you were unwell, or if the local resolution took longer than a year.

The LGO is more likely to investigate complaints where the issues:

- Have had a serious or long-term impact on people's lives
- Affect many other people

They are less likely to investigate complaints where:

- The issues have caused only minor irritation or upset
- They cannot ask the organisation to do what you want

You can file a complaint with the LGO using this link: <http://www.lgo.org.uk/>

They also have a helpline if you want to discuss your complaint before sending it:

0300 061 0614

8:30 – 5:00 pm, Monday to Friday

On their website, you can find their complaints form and a guide on how to complete it. If you don't have access to a computer and need support, please contact Advocacy Focus to speak with an Advocate.

The LGO Process

Step 1

The Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) will confirm that they have received your complaint. If they need more information at this point, they will reach out to you using the details you provided.

If you have already complained directly to the organisation involved, the Assessment Team will determine whether they should investigate your complaint further. The LGO will send you a letter explaining the outcome of this decision. They aim to decide whether your complaint will be investigated **within four weeks**.

Step 2

If the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) decides that your complaint needs a more detailed review, they will pass it to the Investigation Team. You will be informed about the person who is handling your complaint. The LGO may reach out to you or the organisation for more information.

When the LGO believes they have enough information to make a fair decision, they will share a draft decision with you. They usually provide copies of the information that the organisation has given them, but sometimes sensitive information cannot be shared.

The LGO will then give you one last chance to comment or provide any additional information you want them to consider before they make a final decision. After the final decision is made, the LGO will write to you to explain their reasons. They will also send a copy of the decision to the organisation you complained about.

LGO decisions are final, but there are procedures in place if you wish to challenge their decision or make a complaint about the service they provided.

Timescale: The LGO states that it is hard to say how long the investigation will take since every complaint is different. The full process can take many months from start to finish.

Contact Us

advocacy
focus

If you have any comments, compliments or complaints about Advocacy Focus, or our Advocates, please get in touch.



Tel: 0300 323 0965



Live chat: www.advocacyfocus.org.uk

We hope that this information booklet has been useful. If you have any ideas how to make this booklet any better, please email us at:



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