

Statutory Children's Social Care Services Complaints Procedure

There are three stages to the procedure. However, you may not have to go through all of these. It will depend on how satisfied you are with our response at the end of each stage.

Stage 1 - Resolution

You can make your complaint:

- Over the telephone;
- In writing;
- In person, to the member of staff you know best.
- By email using the online form
- By email to enquiries.cbs@gateshead.gov.uk

We want you to tell us what you are unhappy about and what you would like the service to do to put it right. An advocate can be provided to assist you if need help with your complaint.

However, we may not be able to investigate an issue that happened more than 12 months ago.

Once we have received your complaint, you will be sent an acknowledgement letter within two working days. The letter will tell you who will be looking into your complaint and how long you can expect to wait for a response.

Most complaints are resolved at this stage.

After our investigations are complete, you will receive a letter explaining the outcome within 20 working days.

Stage 2 – Investigation

At the end of Stage 1 if you are not satisfied with the outcome you can choose to have your complaint investigated further. The Social Care Complaints Manager will contact you directly to discuss the detail.

However, it may be more appropriate to ask the officer who has investigated your complaint at stage 1 to look again at the issues you remain unhappy with. This may be all that is needed to resolve the complaint to your satisfaction.

If it is decided that a Stage 2 Investigation is necessary, an investigating officer independent of the service complained about is then appointed. An external independent person is also necessary to shadow the investigation to ensure that the process is fair and thorough

So we can be sure of what we are to investigate, you will be asked to sign a definition of complaint. This will be comprised of the issues you remain unhappy with after Stage 1 and your desired outcome, (what you want the service to do to put things right). Once we are clear on your definition and outcome, the investigation can start and you will receive a letter telling you when your complaint has been registered.

The investigation will then commence. The investigating officer and independent person will contact you to arrange a meeting to discuss your complaint and how they plan to investigate it.

Once a draft report is ready, you may be asked to comment on what has been found. If you wish to ask for any changes to this report, please discuss this with the investigating officer.

After the investigation is complete, a senior manager responsible for the service complained about will adjudicate on your complaint.

You should receive a letter within 25 working days, (In complex situations, this could take up to 65 working days), confirming:

- What was found;
- What the service has decided to do about it;
- Why the decisions were reached.
- What to do should you remain unhappy

You will be kept informed of any delays.

Stage 3 - Review Panel

When you receive the written outcome of Stage 2, you will also be sent details of how to ask for the complaint to be heard by a Review Panel.

If you wish the review panel to consider your complaint, you must apply within 20 working days of receiving the written outcome to Stage 2.

A Review Panel is made up of three panel members independent of the Local Authority who will consider your complaint and advise the Local Authority on what they could do to put things right.

A separate leaflet is available on the Review Panel Process.

Once you have received your final outcome from the Chief Executive, it will include information about what you must do if you remain unhappy.

Are there any other ways to complain?

Yes. You can contact:

- Your local Councillor;
- A Solicitor;
- Your MP;

- The Local Government Ombudsman
PO Box 4771
Coventry
CV4 0EH.

LGO Advice Team: 0845 602 1983 or 0247682 1960

Fax: 024 7682 0001

Text "Call Back" on 0762 480 4323

E-mail: advice@lgo.org.uk

Website: www.lgo.org.uk

The Ombudsman will expect you to have gone through the Council's complaint procedure first.