

What else can you do?

Using the complaints procedure does not affect your right to approach your ward councillor or your local member of parliament for help and advice.

Please get in touch with us and help us to help you!

We hope that this leaflet is helpful, but if you have any queries, please contact the Complaints Officer on **01744 671 861** or by email: childrencomplaints@sthelens.gov.uk

This leaflet explains how to make complaints about the services provided by Children and Young People's Services for children and their families, and how we deal with them.

If you have complaints about Adult Services, there is a separate leaflet for your information, entitled 'Are we getting it right in Adult Services?'

Making a complaint?

Who can complain?

Complaints about Children and Young People's Services may be made by:

- Children and young people who receive, or feel they may need, a service from the Department.
 - Children and young people looked after by the local authority, or not looked after by them but in need, or a parent or someone who has parental responsibility.
 - Any local authority foster carer.
 - Children leaving care.
 - Special Guardians.
 - Adopted children, their parent or someone who has parental responsibility.
 - Persons wishing to adopt a child.
 - Adopted persons, their parents, natural parents and former guardians.
 - Adults who have a legitimate interest in the welfare of a child, such as grandparents or other relatives and carers.
 - Children who live in accommodation provided by the Council.
 - Children who live in accommodation provided by another service provider, possibly by arrangement with this Department, are encouraged, in the first instance, to use the service
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provider's own complaints procedure, although they may refer their complaint(s) at any time to the Department's Complaints Officer.

What can you complain about?

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

You can make a representation about any aspect of Children and Young People's Services, including:

- Services to support children within their families.
- Accommodation arrangements for children.
- Aftercare arrangements for young people who have left care.
- Decisions relating to the placement of a child.
- Decisions relating to the handling of a child's case.
- Decision-making process.
- The Department's in-house provision for children – including residential and daycare.
- Behaviour and conduct of Departmental staff.
- The Department's delivery or non-delivery of a service.
- Adoption services.
- Decisions relating to care and supervision orders.
- How a supervision order is supervised.
- Quality and accuracy of court reports.

This is not an exhaustive list.

Your complaint should be made within **12 months** of the event about which you are complaining, or we may decide that we cannot consider it.

Stage 3 – Review Panel

You will need to let us know, in writing, what it is that still concerns you and we will arrange for your views to be heard at a Review Panel.

The Review Panel will consist of three independent people who have no connection with Children and Young People's Services or St. Helens Council. They will have no previous involvement/knowledge of your complaint.

The Review Panel will look at how your complaint was investigated and what the Department has done. It will not reinvestigate the complaint, nor will it consider any new complaints.

You will be invited to attend the Review Panel and you can make representations to it. You may also bring a friend, relative or advocate along to support you.

The Director of Children and Young People's Services will write to you within **20 working days** of the date of the Panel meeting, outlining what actions the Department intends to take in response to the Panel's recommendations.

What if you are still unhappy?

The Review Panel is the end of the complaints process, but if you are still dissatisfied then you may take your complaint to The Local Government Ombudsman Advice Team by telephoning: 0300 061 0614 or 0845 602 1983.

Alternatively, you may write to:
The Local Government Ombudsman,
PO Box 4771,
Coventry,
CV4 0EH

You have the right to approach the Ombudsman at any time, but he/she will usually expect you to have used the Council's procedure before he/she will investigate.

Assurances

We recognise your right to complain, and make the following assurances:

- Your complaint will be considered and, if needs be, investigated as thoroughly, fairly and speedily as possible.
- Your complaint will be treated in the strictest confidence; only those members of staff who need to know about your complaint will be told about it.
- You can be accompanied and/or represented at any stage of the complaints procedure by a friend, relative, or advocate who can assist you to represent your views to the Department.
- Your complaint will be acknowledged in writing and you will be kept informed in writing of all significant developments whilst your complaint is being considered, particularly the findings and conclusions made from the investigation.
- You will not be discriminated against because you have made a complaint.
- We will ensure that any concerns about the protection of children are referred immediately to the relevant team or to the Police.

Stage 1 – Local resolution

Initially, you should try explaining your concerns to the member of staff with whom you are in direct contact. If this is not possible or if you are still unhappy, you should ask to speak to that person's manager. It is our experience that most problems can be resolved quickly this way.

You can use the form at the back of this leaflet or you can put your complaint in writing and send it to:

Children & Family Services
Atlas House
Corporation Street
St.Helens
WA9 1LD
Tel: 01744 671 861
childrencomplaints@sthelens.gov.uk

We understand that some people may find it difficult to complain. You may be anxious, or have difficulties speaking and communicating. If you need help in explaining your complaint, please contact the Complaints Officers, who can arrange to see you.

A Children's Rights Officer is available to support the interests of any child in St.Helens, at any stage of the complaints process. You can contact this service on 01744 750 729, or we will make contact on your behalf.

The manager responsible for the services you receive will look into the circumstances of your complaint and aim to resolve the problem, and write to you within **10 working days**. This response will outline what they have found and what actions, if any, they intend to take. In some cases this may take a little longer to resolve, but we will keep you informed, and aim to complete the process in a maximum of **20 working days**.

If you are dissatisfied with the response you receive at **Stage 1**, the agreed timescale has elapsed or you wish to make your complaint formal immediately, then you can request to move to **Stage 2**. This request must be made within **20 working days** of receiving the **Stage 1** response.

Stage 2 – Investigation

At this stage, your complaint has to be put in writing. You may wish to do this by letter, or completing the form at the back of this leaflet. You may also wish to discuss this with a Complaints Officer, who will record your complaints and write to you to agree them. Your complaint will then be registered.

After consulting with senior management, an investigating officer will be appointed. The investigating officer may be a Departmental Manager who has no direct responsibility for the staff or services you have complained about, or may be someone wholly independent of the Department.

Additionally, an independent person has to be appointed to follow the Department's investigation. The independent person is someone who is not, and never has been, a St.Helens Councillor or employee of the Council, and who can bring an informed, yet wholly impartial element, to the Department's investigation of your complaints.

The investigating officer will contact you to clarify your complaints and your desired outcomes, and discuss how they intend to investigate your complaint. The investigation should be completed, and you should receive a response within **25 working days** of the registration of your complaint. In some cases this may be extended to a maximum of **65 working days**, but this would be discussed with you.

The investigator will prepare a written report detailing the findings and any recommendations to help resolve your complaint. The Adjudicating Officer (Assistant Director) will write a response to you to inform you of the action he/she intends to take, based on the report.

If you are still unhappy following the response from the Adjudicating Officer, you can ask to move your complaint to **Stage 3**. You must complete and return the 'Request for Review Panel' form included with the response, within **20 working days** of the receipt of the response.