Have your say

A guide to making compliments, comments and complaints about Children’s Services (CS)

How can we help you?

Hertfordshire County Council’s Children’s Services (CS) aims to offer high quality services and would like to hear from you if you have any compliments, comments or complaints about the services we provide.

This leaflet explains how you may register a compliment, comment or a complaint and how Children’s Services will respond. Information and an online form for registering compliments, comments and complaints can also be found at: www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/complaints.

Who else can help?

If you want help and support from somebody independent of Children’s Services you may contact:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Telephone</th>
<th>Website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advisory Centre for Education</td>
<td>0300 0115 142</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ace-ed.org.uk">www.ace-ed.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carers in Hertfordshire</td>
<td>01992 586969</td>
<td><a href="http://www.carersinherts.org.uk">www.carersinherts.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childline</td>
<td>0800 11 11</td>
<td><a href="http://www.childline.org.uk">www.childline.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens Advice</td>
<td>0344 411 1444</td>
<td><a href="http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk">www.citizensadvice.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Lives</td>
<td>0808 800 2222</td>
<td><a href="http://www.familylives.org.uk">www.familylives.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HertsHelp (Advocacy Services)</td>
<td>0300 123 4044</td>
<td><a href="http://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/hertshelp">www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/hertshelp</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSPCC</td>
<td>0808 800 5000</td>
<td><a href="http://www.nspcc.org.uk">www.nspcc.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POhWER (Advocacy Service)</td>
<td>0300 456 2370</td>
<td><a href="http://www.pohwer.net">www.pohwer.net</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Advocacy for children and young people is available from the following service:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Telephone</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Youth Advocacy Service</td>
<td>0808 808 1001</td>
<td><a href="mailto:help@nyas.net">help@nyas.net</a> (Email)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hertfordshire County Council

Resources

www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/complaints
When can I register a complaint about Children’s Services?

If you are not happy with the way the department works with you or with the standard of services provided, you may register a compliant so that this can be investigated.

We will also accept complaints about other organisations providing services on behalf of Children’s Services.

All complaints must be submitted within 12 months from the date of the incident(s) in question.

Not everyone has an automatic right to complain. For example, extended family members such as Grandparents, Aunts and Uncles do not have an automatic right to complain.

There may be a risk of breaching the Data Protection Legislation if the Council communicates with others.

People without Parental Responsibility may not have a right to access information held about children the department is working with. Someone with Parental Responsibility for the child(ren) in question would normally need to consent in writing to a third party taking a complaint forward on their behalf.

What is a complaint?

A complaint is a formal expression of dissatisfaction about a service or the way you have been treated, requiring a written response.

A complaint may arise if we have:

• Made a mistake.
• Failed to do something we should have done.
• Acted unfairly or unreasonably.
• Acted unlawfully.
• Implemented a policy incorrectly.

This complaints procedure DOES NOT cover:

• Matters for which there is a formal right of appeal through an independent review process.

  This includes:
  - The Fostering and Adoption Independent Review Mechanism.
  - School Admission, School Exclusion and Home to School Transport Appeals.
  - The Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal (First-Tier and Upper-Tier Tribunals).

• Matters which are the subject of legal proceedings.

• Matters of County Council policy which affect all or most people using the department’s services. If you wish to comment about a County Council policy however, you may wish to speak to your County Councillor or tell the people who provide that service.
• Complaints about matters over which Children’s Services have no control, e.g. services provided by District or Borough Councils.

• Matters where the grounds for complaint arose more than 12 months ago.

• Complaints about schools and libraries.

How will my complaint be dealt with?

Before submitting a formal complaint, try discussing your concerns with the service you are dealing with. This is usually the quickest way to resolve matters.

If you decide to raise a formal complaint, please make sure that you provide clear information in terms of what your complaint is about and your desired outcome(s).

Once you have submitted your complaint, the Complaints Manager will decide on the most appropriate process to resolve your concerns and a member of the Complaints Team will write to you to confirm this.

Your complaint may involve up to 3 stages.

**Stage 1** Resolution and response by an Operational Manager. Wherever possible you will get a response from a Manager within 2 weeks (10 working days) or a maximum of 4 weeks (20 working days).

**Senior Management Review (SMR).** An SMR involves a re-evaluation of the complaint and response at Stage 1 of the complaints procedure. A Senior Manager will be appointed to conduct the Review. The Complaints Team will inform you of the name of the Manager and the expected completion date. As part of the review, the Senior Manager may contact you or offer to meet with you. The outcome of the Review will see you provided with a fresh complaint response. This process takes up to 4 weeks (20 working days).

**Stage 2** Investigation and Report by an Investigating Officer. Should you remain dissatisfied, you should write to the Complainants Team. The team will then consider further options, which may include arranging an impartial investigation. If an impartial investigation is identified as the most appropriate way forward, you will be provided with the outcome in a maximum timescale of 13 weeks (65 working days). For children’s Social Care complaints, an Independent Person will work alongside the Investigating Officer. For Corporate Complaints investigations, an Independent Person is not required.

Please note that some requests for Stage 2 are not agreed, e.g. when it is impossible to deliver the complainant’s desired outcomes. Stage 2 represents the conclusion of the procedure for dealing with Education matters and certain other types of complaint.

**Stage 3** Review (of Stage 2 Social Care Complaints) by a Panel. If your request is accepted, the Panel will normally be held within 6 weeks (30 working days).
The Panel will make recommendations to the Director of Children’s Services for the resolution of the complaint. The Director will write to you with the outcome of the Panel within 4 weeks (20 working days) of the Panel taking place.

For further information and an impartial discussion you may contact:

Customer Service Team – Complaints
Postal Point: CH0118
Resources Department
County Hall
Hertford
SG13 8DF
Email: cs.complaints@hertfordshire.gov.uk
Textphone: 0300 123 4041

Calls from Typetalk users and those requiring a language interpreter (via Language Line) are also welcomed. Sign Video and BSL Video Interpreting Services are also available.

For further information, help and support, you may contact the Customer Service Centre on 0300 123 4043. Lines are open from 8am to 8pm Monday to Friday and 9am to 4pm on a Saturday.

Information can also be found online at www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/complaints

If you remain dissatisfied:

You can ask the Local Government Ombudsman to look at the issue again. The Ombudsman’s address is: The Local Government Ombudsman, PO Box 4771, Coventry, CV4 0EH, Telephone: 0300 061 0614, Website: www.lgo.org.uk.

Complaints about schools

All complaints about schools must be made to the school in question directly.

Councils do not control schools and are not responsible for dealing with complaints about them. The law requires all schools to have their own complaints policy which has been approved by Governors and publicised to Parents. This should be available on the School’s website or from the School Office upon request. This should Complaints are usually best resolved through a discussion with the member of school staff most able to help.

If you remain unhappy, you can escalate your complaint to the Head Teacher and then to the school’s Governing Body. In the event that you exhaust a school’s complaints procedure, you may complain to the Secretary of State at the Department for Education (DFE). For Academies, Free Schools, Studio Schools and University Technical Colleges, you may complain to the Education Funding and Skills Agency (ESFA) as these schools are completely independent of Councils.

This information can be made available on request in other formats, including large print, Braille, audio and other languages.