



**Solihull**  
METROPOLITAN  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

**Children's Social Care**

# Complaints and Representations Procedure



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<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>	
1	Introduction	3
2	Key Principles	3
3	Time Limit for making a complaint	4
4	Who may complain?	4
5	What may be complained about?	5
6	Complaints about the Child Protection Process	6
7	What is exempt from the Procedure?	6
8	Anonymous complaints	7
9	Complaints relating to more than one Local Authority	7
10	Help to Complain – advocacy and support for Children & Young People	7
11	The Complaints Process - <i>Complaint Stages 1 to 3</i>	8
12	Local Government Ombudsman	13
13	Problem Solving and Resolution	14
14	Working with Other Procedures	14
15	Deferring (freezing) decisions	15
16	Complaints Concerning Allegations of Child Abuse	15
17	Complaints concerning other Agencies	15
18	Unreasonably Persistent Complainants	15
19	Statutory Complaints Service	16
20	Records Management and Data Protection	17
	Appendix 1 – Adoption Related Functions	
	Appendix 2 – Special Guardianship Related Functions	

## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Complaints and Representations Procedure for Children's Social Care Service reflects Solihull Council's (Solihull Council) statutory obligation to operate a Complaints and Representations Procedure and is in line with the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970, The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 (Statutory Instrument 2006 No. 1738), and the accompanying guidance 'Getting the Best from Complaints' DfES 2006.
- 1.2 The Customer Relations Manager is part of the Children's and Adults Complaints Team which is part of the Business Intelligence and Improvement Division within the Resources Directorate and is responsible for managing the Children's Statutory Complaints and Representations Procedure.
- 1.3 The information provided throughout this Procedure is in accordance with 'Getting the Best from Complaints' 2006, which is available at:  
[Children's social care: getting the best from complaints - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/111111/Children's_social_care_getting_the_best_from_complaints_-_GOV.UK.pdf)
- 1.4 This procedure sets out "*a statutory procedure for a child or young person who is likely to want to make representations, including complaints about the actions, decisions or apparent failings of a local authority's children's social services provision; and to allow any other appropriate person to act on behalf of the child or young person concerned or make a complaint in their own right*". (Getting the Best from Complaints 2006 Section 2.1.2)

## 2 Key Principles

- 2.1 All forms of feedback from service users and their carers should be used to instigate service improvements. Comments and compliments that raise, share and promote best practice along with positive feedback can be as important as responding to and acting upon issues raised through complaints.
- 2.2 People who make complaints should have their concerns resolved swiftly and, wherever possible, by the manager of the service being provided. The complaints procedure is a useful tool which can indicate where services may need improving; it is not a negative process for apportioning blame.
- 2.3 A complaint is generally defined as "*an expression of dissatisfaction or disquiet in relation to an individual child or young person, which requires a response*". (Getting the Best from Complaints 2006 S2.1.3)
- 2.4 Solihull Council Solihull Council is required to provide complainants with information about advocacy services and offer help to obtain an advocate, as well as providing them with information about Solihull Council their complaints procedure, including how to contact the Customer Relations Manager.
- 2.5 The complainant has the right to approach the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) at any time. The Ombudsman however, would normally expect the Council to consider the complaint initially and may refer it back to the Council if this has not been done.
- 2.7 Complaints may be made via Solihull Council's website at [Children's Services Complaints and Compliments \(solihull.gov.uk\)](http://solihull.gov.uk/childrens-services-complaints) , in writing, on the telephone, by email or by using the forms. They can also be made by speaking to the person who is providing the service, for example the social worker or family support worker.

- 2.8 Comments are views, concerns or suggestions for improving a service; these should be logged and passed to the relevant service manager for consideration and a response if requested.
- 2.9 Compliments are praise for a member of staff or a service which should also be logged and forwarded to the member of staff and their manager for their information and records, as well as to the Children's and Adults Complaints Team. Managers will record these and should highlight best practice with others to help service and practice improvement. Communications colleagues can also be advised of these for inclusion in relevant publications / press releases.
- 2.10 Representations which are complaints about a policy or a policy change will be processed under the Corporate Complaints Procedure.
- 2.11 Solihull Council is committed to learning from all forms of feedback; including complaints and compliments and has established systems to ensure that this takes place.

### **3 Time Limit for making a complaint**

- 3.1 Solihull Council will not generally consider complaints made more than one year after the grounds to make the complaint arose (Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006, Regulation 9). Solihull Council however has the discretion to extend this time limit, if it feels that *"it is still possible to consider the complaints effectively and efficiently, or where it would be unreasonable to expect the Complainant to have made the complaint earlier; for example, where a child was not able to make the complaint or did not feel confident in bringing it forward in the year time limit"*. (Getting the Best from Complaints 2006 Section 3.3.2)

### **4 Who may complain?**

- 4.1 Section 26(3) and section 24D of the Children Act, 1989 and section 3(1) of the Adoption and Children Act, 2002 require the responsible authority to consider representations including complaints made to it by:
- any child or young person (or a parent of his or someone who has parental responsibility for him) who is being looked after by the local authority or is not looked after by them but is in need;
  - any local authority foster carer (including those caring for children placed through independent fostering agencies);
  - children leaving care;
  - Special Guardians;
  - a child or young person (or parent of his) to whom a Special Guardian order is in force;
  - any person who has applied for an assessment under section 14F(3) or (4);
  - any child or young person who may be adopted, their parents and guardians;
  - persons wishing to adopt a child;
  - any other person whom arrangements for the provision of adoption services extend;
  - adopted persons, their parents, natural parents and former guardians; and
  - such other person as the local authority consider has sufficient interest in the child or young person's welfare to warrant his representations being considered by them.

- 4.2 If the person complaining is listed above, they can make a complaint in their own right and do not need the child's consent to do so; however, Solihull Council will be cautious about the information that is shared about the child with the complainant (*see the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman's Guide for practitioners - Updated November 2023*).

Where a complaint is made on behalf of a child, Solihull Council will where possible seek confirmation that the child or young person is happy for this to happen and that the complaint reflects their concerns or is in their best interests.

- 4.3 The Children Act, 1989 gives Solihull Council discretion to decide whether or not the representative making the complaint on behalf of the child or young person is suitable to act in this capacity or has Parental Responsibility or has sufficient interest in the child's welfare.
- 4.4 The Council may receive complaints by adults that relate to a child or young person but are not made on the child's behalf. The Children Act, 1989 gives discretion to local authorities to decide in cases where eligibility is not automatic (i.e. not listed at 4.1 above), whether or not an individual has sufficient interest in the child's welfare to justify their complaint being considered by them. In reaching a decision, and where possible, the local authority will check with the child or young person that he is happy with the person making a complaint.
- 4.5 Complaints concerning:
- Early Help
  - Child protection including S47 enquiries and conferences
  - Assessments of potential foster carers and adopters
  - Foster carer registration are usually exempt from the statutory complaints process (although there are exceptions about which the Complaints Team can advise).

If the statutory complaints process is not applicable, complaints are often investigated via the Council's corporate complaints process

## **5 What may be complained about?**

- 5.1 A complaint may be about Solihull Council's discharge of its functions under the Children Act 1989, The Care Leavers Act 2000 or the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and relate to either the provision of or failure of any of its social services functions.
- 5.2 The points below are offered as a guide only and therefore should not be used as an exhaustive list:
1. An unwelcome or disputed decision;
  2. Concern about the quality or appropriateness of a service;
  3. Delay in decision making or the provision of services;
  4. Delivery or non-delivery of services; including the complaints procedure;
  5. The quantity, frequency, change or cost of a service;
  6. Attitude or behaviour of staff;
  7. The application of eligibility and assessment criteria;
  8. The impact on a child or young person of the application of an Solihull Council policy;
  9. Quality of assessments, care management and reviews.
- 5.3 Where a complaint can be resolved immediately and easily by giving information or clarifying an enquiry, there is no need to invoke the procedures. In these situations a record should be made in the service user's social care file.

- 5.4 The following functions may also be the subject of a complaint:
- Any decision made by Solihull Council in respect of the Pre-Proceedings Process;

Part 4 of the Children Act, 1989:

- The decision made by Solihull Council to initiate care proceedings or supervision orders (section 31);
- The effect of the care order and Solihull Council's actions and decisions where a care order is made (section 33);
- The decisions regarding parental contact with children in Solihull Council's care (section 34);
- How supervisors perform their duties where a supervision order is in force (section 35); and

Part 5 of the Children Act, 1989:

- The actions of Solihull Council regarding applications for and duties in relation to child assessment orders (section 43); and
- Matters relating to applications for emergency protection orders and decisions relating to the return of children who have been removed (section 44).

### **Adoption-related and Special Guardianship functions**

- 5.5 There are adoption-related functions which may also be the subject of a complaint; see Appendix 2 for those adoption functions included in the 2006 Regulations.
- 5.6 For the functions of the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 included by the 2006 Regulations that may be the subject of a complaint, see Appendix 3.

## **6 Complaints about the Child Protection Process**

- 6.1 In general the Children's Statutory Complaints procedure should be used to respond to complaints about Solihull Council's Children's Social Work Service provision and the Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership (LSCP) complaints process should normally be used to respond to complaints about the conduct or outcome of a Child Protection Conference. The LSCP process can be accessed at [Child protection planning and conferences \(procedures.org.uk\)](http://www.procedures.org.uk)

Solihull Council will however include these complaints within the statutory process if they are made alongside complaints that fall within the statutory process. This is to ensure a streamlined process for the complainant.

- 6.2 Where a complaint is received by the Children's and Adults Complaints Team and the Customer Relations Manager identifies there are issues that may potentially fall under the LSCP complaints process, the Customer Relations Manager will arrange a meeting with the Child Protection and Review Unit Manager as soon as possible to agree a planned and co-ordinated way to manage the complaints and the complainant will be advised. For example complaints about the outcome of a child protection conference can be made on the grounds of the quality of the social work assessment / lack of social work services and would be managed under the Children's Statutory Complaints Procedure. The outcome would then inform the Local Safeguarding Children's Partnership complaints process which would consider if the conference had the appropriate information and / or the information had been given due consideration in reaching a decision regarding the need for a Child Protection Plan.

6.3 Where complaints may fall under another agency's complaints procedure, see section 17 below.

## **7 What is exempt from the Procedure?**

7.1 The following provides examples of what is exempt from the Procedure. This is not an exhaustive list:

1. The person wishing to complain does not meet the requirements of "who may complain," and is not acting on behalf of such an individual;
2. The complaint is not in relation to the actions or decisions of Solihull Council, or of anybody acting on its behalf;
3. Complaints made more than one year after the grounds to make the complaint arose (Regulation 9), subject to Solihull Council's discretion as outlined in section 3.1 above.
4. The same complaint has already been dealt with at all stages of the procedure;
5. Regulation 8 provides Solihull Council with the discretion to decide whether to consider complaints where to do so would prejudice any of the following concurrent investigations:
  - disciplinary or grievance proceedings;
  - Court Proceedings;
  - Tribunals;
  - Criminal Proceedings.

7.2 When a complaint is received, checks should be made to ensure no concurrent HR investigation / process is underway.

7.3 Solihull Council must write to the Complainant explaining its decision and specifying the relevant concurrent investigation (Regulation 8(3)).

7.4 Once the concurrent investigation has been concluded / discontinued the Complainant may resubmit their complaint to Solihull Council within one year of the concurrent investigation being concluded / discontinued.

7.5 Complaints concerning the complaints process will normally be considered under the Corporate Complaints Procedure.

7.6 Complaints concerning schools cannot be considered under this procedure and should be made to the relevant school direct.

7.7 Complaints about the Special Education Needs Team will be dealt with under the Corporate Complaints Procedure unless the complaints concern issues which should be addressed by the relevant Tribunal process.

## **8 Anonymous Complaints**

8.1 Anonymous complaints fall outside the scope of the Statutory Complaints Procedure. They should be recorded and assessed for any actions that may need to be taken which may include referral to other procedures as relevant.

## **9. Complaints relating to more than one local authority**

- 9.1 Complaints relating to more than one local authority should be considered by the authority which is looking after the child or in any other case by the authority within whose area the child is ordinarily resident.

## **10 Help to Complain – advocacy and support for Children and Young People**

- 10.1 Solihull Council's Children's Social Work Service work in partnership with the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) who provide advocacy services for children and young people in Solihull. Advocates provide independent and confidential information, advice, representation and support to the child or young person making a complaint. The Children's and Adults Complaints Team will support children making complaints, to access and advocate via NYAS as required.

## **11 The Complaints Process**

- 11.1 The Children's and Adults Complaints Team aims to provide an accessible complaints service and to promote a 'listening and learning culture'. The team also provides advice and guidance to managers who provide complaint responses and to staff who may be involved in complaint investigations. They will also ensure that the complainant and relevant staff are kept informed about the progression of the complaint.
- 11.2 The Children's and Adults Complaints Team will record the complaint on the Respond database and will maintain a record of all letters, emails and telephone contacts in respect of the complaint and its progress.
- 11.3 The Children's and Adults Complaints Team will check the Complainant's status in relation to making complaints and clarify / define the complaints and the Complainants desired outcomes. The team will write to the Complainant acknowledging receipt of their complaints, within **three working days** of receiving the complaint; the letter will detail their defined complaints and desired outcomes. A copy of the issues in this acknowledgment letter will be sent to the Team Manager who will provide a response as detailed in section 11.12 below. The date of the acknowledgement letter is used as the start of the complaint timescale.
- 11.4 Where the Customer Relations Manager receives a complaint and identifies issues that may potentially fall under the LSCP complaints process, please see section 6 above for the initial process to follow.
- 11.5 Where a Complainant requests that their complaints be considered directly at Stage 2 of the complaints process, or when defining a complaint it becomes apparent that a Stage 1 investigation is not appropriate, the Customer Relations Manager will need to agree progression to Stage 2 of the procedure, with the Complainant.

### **Complaints concerning different services**

- 11.6 Where a complaint relates to a number of different services, for example the Child Protection Review Unit or an External Fostering Provider, the Customer Relations Manager will liaise with the relevant parties and confirm any agreement in writing or, where necessary, convene a planning meeting to develop an agreed plan as to how and who will respond to the complaints, as some concerns may be about the contracting process. These meetings will be minuted with agreed actions. See also sections 6 above and 17 below.



## Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)

- 11.7 Efforts to resolve a complaint should be continued during the consideration of the complaint. Alternative ways of seeking a resolution should be considered at any stage of the complaints process.
- 11.8 There are a number of methods that could be used to resolve a complaint that do not require a full investigation, these include:
- The provision of an apology or an explanation;
  - Conciliation and mediation;
  - An agreement for the reassessment of the children or young person's needs;
  - Practical action specific to the particular complainant;
  - An agreement to a review of practice; and,
  - An assurance that Solihull Council will monitor the effectiveness of its remedy.
- 11.9 For example mediation can be considered **at any stage** of the complaints process and may be offered as an alternative process to help resolve the complaint more speedily, through all the relevant parties (including the social worker, the team manager and the Complainant) meeting to discuss the complaint issues and agreeing a way forward to help resolve the complaint.
- 11.10 Where the Complainant agrees to Alternative Dispute Resolution, following a Stage 2 investigation, it will not restrict their right to request a Stage 3 Review Panel, as long as it is within the 20-working day timescale. The Complainant can also terminate the Alternative Dispute Resolution process at any time, should they wish to invoke their right to a Stage 3 Review Panel.
- 11.11 The complaints process consists of three Stages
- Stage 1 – Local Resolution
  - Stage 2 – Investigation/Mediation
  - Stage 3 – Review Panel

### Stage 1 - Local Resolution

- 11.12 A Stage 1 complaint should be addressed at a local level by the Team Manager (**Responding Manager**) who has responsibility for the service. The Children's and Adults Complaints Team will send an acknowledgement letter to the Complainant within **three working days** of receipt, it will detail the defined complaints and desired outcomes; who will be dealing with their complaint, the expected date of the response, information about Advocacy Services and a copy of the complaints process flowchart will be included. A copy of this letter will be passed to the Responding Manager to enable them to provide their response to the complaints. The date of the acknowledgement letter is used as the start of the complaint timescale and for monitoring performance. The Children's and Adults Complaints Team will also provide advice as to the progression of the complaint and ensure that the Complainant and relevant staff are kept informed.
- 11.13 There is a **10-working day** timescale for Stage 1 complaints, which starts from the date of the acknowledgement letter and most complaints should where possible be concluded within this time limit. However, if the response cannot be completed within this timescale it can be extended to **20 working days** in complex circumstances and the Complainant must be informed. If necessary, the complaint may be suspended until an Advocate has been appointed and the 10 working days starts on the date of the appointment of the Advocate. The completion date can also be another date (outside of this timescale) requested by the Complainant.

- 11.14 A copy of the complaint and accompanying information will be sent to the Responding Manager by email. The Responding Manager should make contact with the Complainant and where possible arrange to meet them to discuss the nature of their complaint and explore the outcomes they desire and seek to resolve the matter. The Children's and Adults Complaints Team will liaise with the responding manager on a regular basis to establish the status of the complaint and provide any advice or guidance as required.
- 11.15 The Responding Manager will then make suitable enquires and provide the Complainant with a written response letter which includes confirmation of the outcomes; it should also inform them that they may request a Stage 2 complaint investigation should they remain dissatisfied and their right to approach the Local Government Ombudsman.
- 11.16 The Responding Manager should then provide a copy of the response letter and a completed Complaint Monitoring and Learning Form – Stage 1, to the Children's and Adults Complaints Team.
- 11.17 Where the Complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcomes of the Stage 1, they can request a Stage 2 Investigation into their complaint within **20 working days** of the date of the Stage 1 response letter. In the absence of such a request the complaint file will be closed.
- 11.18 Where Solihull Council and the Complainant have resolved matters, Solihull Council must as soon as possible provide the Complainant / Advocate with written details of the resolution.

### **Stage 2 – Investigation**

- 11.19 All requests for a Stage 2 investigation should be made in writing to the Customer Relations Manager within **20 working days** of the Stage 1 response letter and it should specify what the Complainant remains dissatisfied with, why, and what outcome(s) they are seeking. The Children's and Adults Complaints Team will then inform the relevant Team Manager, their Head of Service and the appropriate Adjudicating Officer that a new Stage 2 request has been received and actioned.

### **Investigation**

- 11.20 An Independent Investigating Officer will be appointed by the Customer Relations Manager to carry out a Stage 2 Investigation, into those complaints as defined at Stage 1, which remain unresolved. Throughout the investigation an Independent Person (someone not employed by Solihull Council) will work alongside the Independent Investigating Officer to provide an independent and objective view of the investigation into the complaints. The Investigating Officer and Independent Person will meet with the Complainant to confirm the complaints investigated at Stage 1 and what their desired outcome(s) are. The Investigating Officer will inform the Complainant that a written record of the of meeting will be sent to them and explain that there is a time limit for returning the signed record, as this is important in ensuring a timely completion of the investigation. It will be further explained, that where the formal record is not returned signed, it will be taken as accepted and will be used as evidence in the investigation. Where it is agreed that the desired outcomes cannot be achieved through the Complaints Procedure this will be explained and where possible an alternative route provided.

- 11.21 It is normally expected that a Stage 2 Investigation and Adjudication response would be completed within **25 working days**. However, there are times where the Investigating Officer will require an extension to timescale; *with the agreement of the Complainant*, this can be extended to a maximum of **65 working days**. These timescales must include the time required for the council to consider the Investigation reports and provide its response. For all Stage 2 investigations the timescale will commence from the date the Complainants request for a Stage 2 was received.
- 11.22 On completion of the investigation the Independent Investigating Officer will write a report as set out in the 'IIO Good Practice Guidance'. This will include their findings, outcomes and recommendations.
- 11.23 In some cases the Independent Investigating Officer may feel the need to write a separate report for management consideration; highlighting areas of concern, which have been identified that do not directly concern the complaint or the Complainant. Titled a Management in Confidence Report; this will be provided to the Customer Relations Manager who will share it with the appropriate officers in Children's Services.
- 11.24 The Customer Relations Manager will quality assure the Investigating Officer's report. The Independent Person will also produce a brief report including their view upon whether the investigation has been conducted fairly, this will also be quality assured by the Customer Relations Manager. Both reports will then be sent to the nominated Adjudicating Officer for consideration.

### **Adjudication**

- 11.25 The Adjudicating Officer (appropriate Head of Service / Service Director) will consider the Independent Investigating Officers findings and recommendations and they will respond to the Complainant on behalf of Solihull Council within **10 working days** of receiving the investigation reports. The response letter will include the Complainants right to ask for any unresolved complaints to be further considered by a Review Panel at Stage 3 of the procedures
- 11.26 The Adjudicating Officer may wish to meet the Customer Relations Manager, Investigating Officer and Independent Person to clarify any aspects of the reports.
- 11.27 The Adjudicating Officer will also complete an Action Plan based on the recommendations. This will include nominating members of staff who will be responsible for completing the actions and timescales for the completion.
- 11.28 The Customer Relations Manager will send the Adjudicator's response letter with copies of the Investigation Officer's and Independent Person's reports to the Complainant.
- 11.29 A copy of the response letter, report and action plan will be sent to the Head(s) of Service, all members of staff who have been interviewed and managers who have identified tasks on the action plan and they will be asked to provide confirmation and evidence when the tasks have been completed. The Children's and Adults Complaints Team will monitor the progress / completion of Action Plans to ensure the tasks are completed within the timescale set by the Adjudicating Officer.
- 11.30 The Adjudicating officer should also update the Complaint Monitoring and Learning Form – Stage 2 to take account of any additional learning points identified by the Stage 2 investigation and forward a copy to the Service Director, Children and Young People and the Children's and Adults Complaints Team for monitoring and reporting purposes.

11.31 Should the Complainant remain dissatisfied with the conclusion of the Stage 2 investigation, they may request consideration of their complaint by a Review Panel at Stage 3 of the procedure. This must be made within **20 working days** of receiving the Stage 2 response letter.

### **Stage 3 – Review Panel**

11.32 To ensure impartiality the Review Panel is operated as a separate function within Solihull Council and is managed by the Head of Democratic Services within the Governance Directorate.

11.33 Stage 3 is designed to consider whether Solihull Council adequately dealt with the complaint in the Stage 2 investigation.

11.34 The request to proceed to Stage 3 of the Complaints Procedure should be made in writing to the Customer Relations Manager by the Complainant and must be made within **20 working days** of receiving the Stage 2 response letter.

11.35 The request to proceed to a Review Panel must identify those aspects of the Stage 2 process with which the Complainant is dissatisfied, and the reasons why the Complainant is dissatisfied and must clearly state what outcome(s) they want from a Review Panel. A request which does not clearly do this, or which is received out of time, will not be accepted. A Stage 2 response will be deemed to have been received by the Complainant on the **third working day** after posting.

11.36 Where a request for a Review Panel is not accepted, reasons for this decision will be provided.

11.37 The Review Panel will only consider those matters set out in the request to proceed to Stage 3. It will not re-investigate the complaint/s and will not consider any new complaints which have not been investigated at Stage 2 of the procedure.

11.38 In considering the complaints being reviewed, the Panel will:

- Review the complaints and consider the adequacy of the Stage 2 investigation,
- Take a problem-solving approach,
- Focus on achieving resolution and avoid a legalistic approach to the review,
- Listen to all parties,
- Reach findings and make recommendations.

11.39 The Review Panel will consist of 3 people one of which will chair the Panel, all of whom will be independent of the Authority. The Customer Relations Manager will ensure that the appropriate people involved with the Stage 2 investigation will also be invited to attend. The Complainant can also be accompanied by another person or for them to speak on their behalf.

11.40 The Review Panel will be held within **30 working days** of receipt of a valid request for a review and the Customer Relations Manager will acknowledge the Complainant's request in writing within **2 working days** of receipt of the request.

11.41 A letter will be sent by Democratic Services not less than **10 working days** before the Panel to the Complainant and all other parties including the Panel Members confirming the date and location of the Panel and will include copies of the complaint papers prepared by the Customer Relations Manager.

### **The Panel Review**

11.42 The Chair will commence the Review by explaining its purpose and the need for confidentiality. The Chair will advise the Complainant of the respective roles and responsibilities of those present and address any questions or concerns that the Complainant may have about the process.

11.43 The Chair will ensure that the Panel's focus is on the agreed complaint and the Complainant's desired outcomes from the Stage 2 investigation.

11.44 The full Panel meeting will begin with presentations on the points of the complaint and desired outcomes by the Complainant or their advocate, then the Solihull Council representative and then, any other person the Panel considers has sufficient interest in the complaints. The purpose of hearing presentations is to understand each party's opinion of the complaint rather than an opportunity to cross-examine attendees. The Chair will also indicate how long the Panellists anticipate that the presentations should last.

11.45 Normally the first presentation will be by the Complainant (or their advocate / representative) who will be invited to 'talk' about the complaint and expand upon any relevant themes that should aid the Panel's deliberation. The Chair will ensure that this presentation is reasonable and relevant, exercising discretion in limiting its scope, substance or duration.

11.46 Panel members should then have sufficient opportunity to ask questions of all present and seek clarification on the issues being discussed so they are in a position to make recommendations regarding the outcome. The Chair will also invite the Complainant, the Solihull Council representative and other attendees to ask questions and raise points of information and opinion as relevant to the complaint.

11.47 The Panel will then go into closed session to reach a determination and form a view about whether Solihull Council adequately dealt with the complaint. It will produce a written report with recommendations, a copy will be sent by Democratic Services to the Complainant and anyone acting on their behalf within **5 working days** of the Review Panel. Copies will also be provided to all who attended the panel and to the Director of Children's Services and the Chief Executive.

11.48 A response to the Panel's report and recommendations will be made by the Service Director, Children and Young People / Chief Executive, in writing to the Complainant (and other participants as necessary). The response should be provided within **15 working days** from receiving the report and should set out how Solihull Council will respond to the recommendations and what action/s they propose to take.

11.49 The Complainant should be informed that this is the end of the internal Complaints Procedure. They should also be informed in writing of their right to approach the Local Government Ombudsman if they remain dissatisfied.

## **12 Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)**

- 12.1 This service is confidential, free of charge and has the same powers as the High Court to require people to provide information and to produce documents for investigation.
- 12.2 Whilst people can approach the Ombudsman at any time, the service states that the Complainant must first take up their complaint with the relevant Local Authority, to allow the organisation the opportunity to address the issues raised.
- 12.3 Where a Stage 2 has been concluded and the facts indicate that all reasonable consideration of the complaint has been undertaken and that further consideration by a Review Panel would not produce a demonstrably different outcome, the Customer Relations Manager in consultation with the Complainant can approach the Ombudsman to ask them to consider the complaint directly without going through a Review Panel. The Customer Relations Manager and the Complainant will need to agree a written statement of the complaint for release by Solihull Council, to the Ombudsman.
- 12.4 Where a Stage 3 Review Panel has been held and the Complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome, they have the right to pursue a complaint to the Ombudsman. In these circumstances the Ombudsman will make a formal request to Solihull Council for all information concerning the complaint. This will be recorded and monitored by the Council's Link Officer and then passed to the responsible Service Director & Head of Service to provide a response. The Link Officer will then forward all documentation to the Ombudsman within the directed timescale.
- 12.5 Details of how to contact the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) can be found at: [Contact us - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#)  
Web site: [www.lgo.org.uk](http://www.lgo.org.uk)

You can call 0300 061 0614 to talk to a complaint's advisor at the LGSCO about registering a new complaint.

- 12.6 In some instances complainants make their complaints directly to the Ombudsman before complaining to the Council, these are usually considered premature complaints and the Ombudsman will normally forward them to Solihull Council for consideration under their complaint's procedures. In some cases however, the Ombudsman may decide to investigate the complaints without referring them to Solihull Council, in such cases they will request all information and a position statement from Solihull Council before making their findings.

## **13 Problem Solving and Resolution**

- 13.1 Problem solving and resolution can be done by various methods, one of which is mediation as described in section 10.13 - Alternative Dispute Resolution, above.
- 13.2 Some other resolution methods that do not require a full investigation and can be invoked during any stage of the complaint's procedure are:
- The provision of an apology or explanation;
  - Conciliation and mediation;
  - A reassessment of the child's or young person's needs;
  - Practical action specific to the particular Complainant;
  - A review of practice;
  - An assurance that Solihull Council will monitor the effectiveness of its remedy.

## **14 Working with Other Procedures**

- 14.1 The Complaints Procedure would normally be suspended if any concurrent investigations might be compromised or prejudiced by continuing with it, for example:
- Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures
  - Safeguarding Procedures
  - Harassment Procedures
  - Police Investigation - Criminal

Any information from the above **will not** form part of the complaints process.

If, after the conclusion of any of the above investigations, the complainant feels that they have complaints that have not been addressed, they may approach the Customer Relations Manager for these complaints to be considered under the Complaints Procedure.

## **15 Deferring (freezing) decisions**

- 14.1 If the complaint concerns change to a care plan, a placement or a service, the decision may need to be deferred (frozen) until the complaint is considered. Care should be taken in case deferring a decision may affect the mental or physical wellbeing of an individual, but the presumption should be in favour of freezing. The decision will be made by the Manager responsible for the service, having considered the advice of the Customer Relations Manager.

## **16 Complaints Concerning Allegations of Child Abuse**

- 16.1 Complaints received by the Children's and Adults Complaints Team concerning allegations of child abuse or ill treatment will be reported to the Solihull MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) and discussed with the appropriate Head of Service.

## **17 Complaints concerning other Agencies**

- 17.1 Where it has been identified that the complaint/s or parts of the complaint/s may potentially fall under another agency's complaints procedure, the Customer Relations Manager will advise the complainant to use that procedure and offer, with their consent and where possible, to pass their complaint/s to the relevant agency.
- 17.2 Where services are integrated or provided in partnership with the NHS, local agreements should ensure that complaints are acknowledged and responded to within one process.

## **18 Unreasonably Persistent Complainants**

- 18.1 Solihull Council is committed to providing a fair and equitable service to those who have reason to complain. However where a Complainant becomes unreasonably persistent or demonstrates unacceptable behaviour, action will be taken in accordance with Solihull Council's Vexatious Procedure.
- 18.2 The Customer Relations Manager and the appropriate Head of Service with advice from a Legal representative where appropriate, will determine if the Vexatious Procedure should be invoked.
- 18.3 Persistent Complainants may include:
- a person who makes the same complaint repeatedly (with minor differences), but never accepts the outcomes;

- a person who seeks an unrealistic/unobtainable outcome and persists in pursuing this, or
- a person with a history of making other unreasonably persistent complaints.

- 18.4 An unreasonably persistent complaint is likely to include some or all of the following:
- an historic and irreversible decision or incident;
  - frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with Solihull Council staff;
  - the Complainant behaving in an aggressive manner to staff or being verbally abusive; or threatening;
  - the Complainant changing aspects of the complaint partway through the investigation or Review Panel;
  - the Complainant making and breaking contact with Solihull Council on an ongoing basis; and
  - the Complainant persistently approaching Solihull Council through different routes about the same issue seeking different responses and / or actions.

## **19 Statutory Complaints Service**

- 19.1 The Complaints Procedure contributes to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. It reflects Solihull Council's ongoing commitment to service development and improving the outcomes for children, by creating a listening and learning culture.
- 19.2 Comments, Compliments and Complaints are managed within the Children's and Adults Complaints Team. The recording and monitoring of all Comments, Compliments and Complaints is carried out by the team in accordance with the Regulations.
- 19.3 The Children's and Adults Complaints Team will produce and publish an Annual Report in accordance with Regulation 13 (3) which will provide information covering all aspects of the complaints received; the process of seeking to resolve them and the timescales taken to resolve them.
- 19.4 Below are some useful contact details and telephone numbers:

Solihull MBC  
 Children's & Adults Complaints Team  
 Council House  
 Manor Square  
 Solihull  
 B91 3QB  
 Telephone 0121 704 8296  
 E-mail: [candacomplaints@solihull.gov.uk](mailto:candacomplaints@solihull.gov.uk)  
 Webpage: [Children's Services Complaints and Compliments \(solihull.gov.uk\)](http://solihull.gov.uk/Children's%20Services%20Complaints%20and%20Compliments)

### **Advocacy Services**

National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS)  
 The Wharf  
 12-16 Bridge St,  
 Birmingham  
 B3 1SJ  
 Freephone: 0808 808 1001  
 Email: [help@nyas.net](mailto:help@nyas.net)  
 Webpage: [Contact Us | Support for Children and Young People | NYAS](http://nyas.net/Contact%20Us%20|%20Support%20for%20Children%20and%20Young%20People%20|%20NYAS)



## **20 Record management and data protection**

- 20.1 All functions of the complaint's procedure must adhere to the requirements of the Data Protection Act, 1998 and the Freedom of Information Act, 2000.
- 20.2 Once the complaint issues have been finally resolved the Children's and Adults Complaints Team will upload a copy of the complaints response to the relevant case file on the Children's Services database as a record of the complaint.
- 20.3 The Children's and Adults Complaints Team will retain and destroy the complaint file in accordance with Solihull Council's RS19 Management Retention Schedule.

## Appendix 1

### STATUTORY COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE FLOWCHART THE PROCEDURE FOR CHILDREN ACT 1989 STATUTORY COMPLAINTS

#### Stage 1 – Local Resolution

Complainant raises concerns with the Children's & Adults Complaints Team (Tel: 0121 704 8296 or email [candacomplaints@solihull.gov.uk](mailto:candacomplaints@solihull.gov.uk) ) at Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council. The Council should consider mediation and conflict resolution at this stage and at all other stages. The Local Authority should make an initial attempt to resolve matters within 10 working days, unless it is deemed from the outset that the full 20 working days will be required to provide a full response to the complaints raised.

(The maximum time scale for the council to respond at Stage 1 is 20 working days. If a response is not provided within 20 working days, the Complainant may contact the Children's & Adults Complaints Team and request an escalation of their complaint to Stage 2)



**If not resolved and following communication between the Customer Relations Manager the complaint progresses to a further investigation**



#### Stage 2 – Investigation

The Council should provide an independent investigation, that produces a report and an adjudication within 25 working days (or within the extended period of 65 working days).

**Note – Where a complaint is made by someone other than the child or young person, councils do not need to seek consent from a young person for their data to be accessed as part of an external complaint investigation; however, the Council needs to consider balancing the rights of the young person to privacy against those of the other person to make a complaint under the statutory complaint procedure when providing a response.**



**If the Complainant remains Dissatisfied, they can contact Children's & Adults Complaints Team (Customer Relations Manager) to request for their concerns to be escalated to Stage 3**



#### Stage 3 – Review Panel

A panel of 3 independent people should meet to consider the complaint(s) further and produce recommendations.



**If the Complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the Panel**



The Complainant can make a referral to Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman, by telephoning 0300 061 0614, or by email at <http://www.lgo.org.uk/make-a-complaint>

**PLEASE NOTE** – a complainant can approach the Local Government Ombudsman (LGSCO) at any stage in the complaints process, however it is unusual for the LGO to investigate a complaint whilst it is still being investigated via this process.

## Appendix 2

### Adoption related functions

The following are the adoption-related functions which may be the subject of a complaint by virtue of being included by the 2006 Regulations:

- Adoption support services (under regulation 3 of the Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005) insofar as these enable adoptive children to discuss matters relating to adoption;
- Assessments and related decisions for adoption support services as under regulation 3 of the 2005 Regulations (Parts 4 and 5 of the 2005 Regulations);
- Placing children for adoption, including parental responsibility and contact issues (sections 18 to 29 of the 2002 Act);
- Removal of children who are or may be placed by adoption agencies (sections 30-35 of the 2002 Act);
- Removal of children in non-agency cases (sections 36-40 of the 2002 Act);
- Duties on receipt of a notice of intention to adopt (section 44 of the 2002 Act);
- Duties set out in regulations in respect of:
  - a Solihull Council considering adoption for a child (part 3 of 2005 Regulations);
  - a proposed placement of a child with prospective adopters (part 5 of 2005 Regulations);
  - placement and reviews (part 6 of 2005 Regulations); records (part 7 of 2005 Regulations);
  - contact (part 8 of 2005 Regulations ); and
- Parental responsibility prior to adoption abroad (part 3 of Adoptions with a Foreign Element Regulations 2005).

## **Appendix 3**

### **Special Guardianship related functions**

The following are the Special Guardianship related functions which may be the subject of a complaint by virtue of being included by the 2006 Regulations:

- All support plan services for Special Guardians;
- Support groups for children and young people to enable them to discuss matters relating to Special Guardianship;
- Assistance in relation to contact;
- Therapeutic services for children and young people; and
- Assistance to ensure the continuation of the relationship between the child and their Special Guardian or prospective Special Guardian.

## Appendix 4

### Solihull Council Children's Social Work Services

#### Internal Complaint Monitoring & Learning Form – Stage 1 (to be completed for ALL complaints)

The Council is committed to learning from complaints. This helps us to implement new services and improve service delivery. In order to assist with this, would you please complete the details in Section B and return this form to the Children's and Adults Complaints Team within 10 working days.

**SECTION A** *To be completed by Children's and Adults Complaints Team*

Name of Complainant:		Respond Ref:	
Name of Service User:		Care First Ref:	
Team Allocated for Complaint Response:			
Responding Manager:			
Date Stage 1 Began:		Date Response Letter Sent:	

**Complaint issue(s):**

1. *Insert Details*

Outcome: Upheld / Not Upheld / Partially Upheld / No Finding. *(Please delete as necessary)*

2. *Insert Details*

Outcome: Upheld / Not Upheld / Partially Upheld / No Finding. *(Please delete as necessary)*

3. *Insert Details*

Outcome: Upheld / Not Upheld / Partially Upheld / No Finding. *(Please delete as necessary)*

4. *Insert Details*

Outcome: Upheld / Not Upheld / Partially Upheld / No Finding. *(Please delete as necessary)*

5. *Insert Details*

Outcome: Upheld / Not Upheld / Partially Upheld / No Finding. *(Please delete as necessary)*

**SECTION B** *To be completed by Responding Manager*

**Please list any learning and actions that need to be taken as a result of the complaint:**

(Please indicate how, by whom and by when these actions will be completed)

Learning	Specific Actions	Responsible Person	Due Date

Name:  
(Responding Manager)

Signed:

Designation:

Date:

**On completion of the Stage 1 you will need to ensure that:**

1. A copy of this form is now placed on the service user's file.
2. A copy is sent to the relevant Head of Service so they can take forward the learning actions.
3. A copy is sent to the Children's and Adults Complaints Team for monitoring and reporting purposes.

**Appendix 5**

**Stage 2 Complaint Investigation – Children’s Services**  
**Action Plan/ Learning Form**

**Part B** to be completed by the Adjudicating Officer who will **review the outcomes and learning from the Stage 1**, look at the recommendations from the Stage 2 investigation and identify any additional **organisational learning**, along with the proposed actions and who will complete these.

**PART A – TO BE COMPLETED BY STATUTORY COMPLAINTS TEAM**

<b>Complaint Reference no from Respond</b>	
<b>Date Stage 2 agreed with complainant</b>	
<b>Investigating Officer and date of report</b>	
<b>Independent Person and date of report</b>	
<b>Adjudicating Officer</b>	

<b>LEARNING IDENTIFIED AT STAGE 1</b>	<b>IMPLEMENTATION DUE DATE</b>	<b>HAS IMPLEMENTATION BEEN CONFIRMED</b>

**Stage 2 Complaint Investigation – Children’s Services**  
**Action Plan from Recommendations/learning**

**Complaint Reference no from Respond:**

**PART B – TO BE COMPLETED BY ADJUDICATING OFFICER**

	<b>Recommendation/learning identified by Adjudicating Officer/ Manager (please indicate whether the learning relates to policy / procedure, best practice or is a training issue)</b>	<b>Action required</b>	<b>Allocated to:</b>	<b>Date to be completed</b>	<b>Date of completion</b>	<b>Signed off by (Adjudicating Officer):</b>
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						



**Any additional resources / support that may be required to affect organisational or professional learning:**

<b>DATE OF ORIGINAL ACTION PLAN</b>	
<b>ADJUDICATING OFFICERS NAME</b>	
<b>ADJUDICATING OFFICERS SIGNATURE</b>	

<b>DATE PLAN ACHIEVED</b>	
<b>ADJUDICATING OFFICERS SIGNATURE</b>	

**On completion of this form the Adjudicating Officer will need to ensure that:**

1. A copy of this form is now placed on the service user's file.
2. A copy is sent to the Service Director, Children & Young People so they can take forward the organisational learning.
3. A copy is sent to the Children's and Adults Complaints Team for monitoring and reporting purposes.