COMPLAINTS

The Children Act complaints procedure on one page

The three stages of the statutory complaints procedure for children's social care in England, with the timescales that apply at each one. Written for complaints teams and the managers who respond to complaints.

Who can complain

A child or young person the authority looks after or is in need, a parent, a special guardian, a local authority foster carer, or anyone the authority considers has sufficient interest in the child's welfare. A complaint is usually made within one year. The authority can accept a later complaint where it would be unreasonable to expect it sooner and a fair investigation is still possible. A child or young person who wants to complain should be offered an advocate, under the October 2026 advocacy guidance.

1 **Stage 1. Local resolution**

The service tries to resolve the complaint directly with the complainant. Response within 10 working days, which can be extended to a maximum of 20 working days.

2 **Stage 2. Investigation**

The complainant can ask for a stage 2 investigation within 20 working days of the stage 1 response. An investigating officer investigates, with an independent person who oversees the process. Investigation, report and adjudication within 25 working days, which can be extended to 65. The adjudication is the authority's response to the findings.

3 **Stage 3. Review panel**

The complainant can ask for a review panel within 20 working days of the stage 2 response. The panel of three independent people meets within 30 working days of the request. The panel sends its report within 5 working days. The authority responds within 15 working days of receiving it.

After stage 3, the complainant can take the complaint to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

Timescales from the Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 and the statutory guidance, Getting the Best from Complaints. Check your own procedure for local arrangements.