

# Making a complaint to Barnsley Council



It is your right to make a complaint, and this can be about anything about the care or services you are receiving from the Council. Making a complaint can be a good way to let the Council know what you think and what you would like to see happen.

Your voice is important to us. It can make a positive difference for you and for others. We are always happy to listen to what children, young people, their parents, and carers have to say.

## What is a complaint?

A complaint can be made when you are unhappy about a service, a decision, an action, or something you've been told by the council which you think we have got wrong.

We welcome complaints because it gives us a chance to understand what has made someone unhappy, lets us explain what has happened, and what we can do to make things better if we find something has gone wrong.

You can make a complaint about anything that has happened, or of something you have found out about in the last year (12 months).

## When should I make a complaint?

If you are unhappy, it's important that you tell us as soon as possible so we can work with you to understand and sort this out together. It may be that what you tell us can be sorted out quickly and may not need to be looked into as a complaint.

You can tell someone if you are unhappy, this could be your social worker or independent reviewing officer (IRO), a foster carer or a parent or carer, or someone you know and trust, such as a teacher.

You can also ask for support from an advocate. An advocate is a person who will listen to you, support you and be with you every step of the way when you are making a complaint.

## What should I do if I'm not happy?



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**Step 1:** You can try talking to the person or service you are unhappy with.

If you talk directly to the person or service who you are unhappy with, let them know why you are unhappy. This can often be quickest way to get things sorted out before making a complaint.

We understand that sometimes you might not want to do this or if you've tried and it hasn't helped then you can look at step 2.

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**Step 2:** You can contact the Childrens Rights and Advocacy service.

If you feel you need support, a member of this team can arrange to come and see you to talk about what is making you unhappy and how we can help to try and sort this out for you. We call the person who would help you with this an advocate.

You can ask your Social Worker or someone you trust to contact them for you, or you can email [childrensrightsadvocacy@barnsley.gov.uk](mailto:childrensrightsadvocacy@barnsley.gov.uk) or call 01226 753406.

The advocate will work with people in the council to sort things out for you. We hope this will fix things for you but if it doesn't your advocate will help you through the next steps.

You can also contact the Customer Resolution Team about your complaint. This is the team in the Council who are responsible for making sure complaints are handled correctly. You can email them at [customerresolutionteam@barnsley.gov.uk](mailto:customerresolutionteam@barnsley.gov.uk) or call them on 01226 773555.

## What happens when I make a complaint?



### Formal complaint (Stage 1 complaint)

**Step 1:** your advocate will support you at every step at this stage. They will contact the Customer Resolution Team, who are the team who handles complaints in the Council. A person from the Customer Resolution Team may ask to talk to you about your complaint. This could be over the phone, or they might come out to see you with your advocate.

**Step 2:** Once they have been out to see you and listened to your complaint, they will create a complaint resolution plan which they will send to your advocate, this will have a list of your complaints and the things you would like to see from your complaint.

**Step 3:** Your advocate will then arrange to come out to see you and go through the complaint resolution plan to see if you want to add or change anything. Once you are happy with this plan your advocate will let the Customer Resolution Team know.

**Step 4:** Your complaint resolution plan will be allocated to a manager, who will start looking into your complaint. This can take between 10-20 working days (2-4 weeks). They may want to speak with you or meet with you to talk about your complaint or they may speak to your advocate if they need any more information.

**Step 5:** You will receive a response in writing which explains what we have found from looking into your complaint. Your advocate will go through this with you to make sure you understand and check if this has sorted out your complaint for you. If you are still unhappy your advocate will tell you what you can do next and will contact the Customer Resolution Team. It might be that we can arrange to talk with the investigator and see if we can sort things out quickly for you before moving onto the next stage.

## Stage 2: Senior manager investigation

**Step 1:** the Customer Resolution Team will ask another Manager who has not been involved in your complaint to look into your complaint. This could be a Manager within Children's Services, or it may be someone that doesn't work for the Council at all.

The Investigator is helped to look into your complaint by an Independent Person. Their job is to make sure the investigation is fair and thorough. They will be someone who doesn't work for the Council. We call them the investigation team. They may want to meet with you in person to check they understand what your complaint is.

**Step 2:** the investigation team will meet with staff members and will look at your records.

**Step 3:** the investigating team will both write a report saying what they have found and whether they agree or not with your complaints. They will also say if there is anything we can do to learn from what they have found. They share a copy of this report with a Senior Manager within Children's Services.

**Step 4:** a copy of the reports and a letter from the Senior Manager will be shared with you. Your advocate will go through this with you to make sure you understand and to check if this has sorted out your complaint for you. If you are still unhappy your advocate will tell you what you can do next and will contact the Customer Resolution Team. It might be that we can arrange to talk with the Senior Manager and see if we can sort things out quickly for you before moving onto the next stage.

Stage 2 investigations can take between 25 working days (5 weeks) to a maximum of 65 working days (13 weeks). The Customer Resolution Team will let you know

when you can expect to receive the reports and letter, and your advocate will keep you updated at each step too.

### Stage 3: Independent review panel

**Step 1:** the Customer Resolution Team will ask three people who don't work for the Council to arrange a meeting where they can look at what has happened at Stage 2 and the things you are still unhappy about. The three people will be called the review panel, and a meeting will take place to talk about your complaint.

**Step 2:** before the meeting takes place, we will send everyone who is coming to the meeting a copy of the most important documents we hold about your complaint such as your complaint plan and the responses you have received so far. We call this the panel papers. You and your advocate will get a copy of these.

**Step 3:** the panel will meet and talk about your complaint; you can attend this meeting with your advocate too so that you can tell the panel why you are unhappy and what would resolve your complaint.

**Step 4:** the panel will send a letter to you and the head of children's services with what they have found and whether they agree or not with your complaints 5 working days after the panel meeting. The director of children's services will then send you a letter 15 working days after the panel's letter with their decision.

The panel meeting will take place 30 working days (6 weeks) after you asked your complaint to go to Stage 3. In total it will take 50 working days (10 weeks) for this stage to finish.

## What happens if I'm still unhappy after making a complaint?



If you are still not happy after Stage 3 you can take your complaint to the [Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#).

The Ombudsman will tell you and your advocate if they can look into your complaint and what they will do next. Sometimes they may decide to investigate your complaint, and an investigator will be asked to contact the Council to look into what the Council has done to try and resolve your complaint. The investigator will then write to you, your advocate, and the Council with their draft decision and ask you all to let them know if you have any comments. After doing this they will then issue a final decision report which they will share with you and the Council.

The Ombudsman's decision will say if they have found anything wrong with what the Council has or has not done and if they find this, they will make recommendations for the Council to complete.

## Important things to remember



- Your advocate will support you through every stage of making a complaint. If you want them to, they can speak in meetings for you, have copies of letters and reports about your complaint so they can go through these with you and they will let you know what is happening at every step.
- Making a complaint is a way of letting the Council know about a worry or concern that you have. Complaints are important to us, and we really need to know about these so that we can look into them and resolve these with you. Sometimes we might need to make a change to our services if we find what we have been doing hasn't worked as we had wanted it to.
- We can only look at concerns that have happened or you have found out about in the last year. We might not be able to look at the matter after this time. We will always tell you what we can and cannot look at as a complaint.

