

Anonymous / serial referrals, same day cases closed.

As part of our series of reports compiled from the 44 questions we asked child social services councils, anonymous referrals and serial complainers were high on our agenda. Serial complainers in this context referred to those people who make numerous referrals to child social services about people they know or in their area. The reporter had to clarify this to a number of council areas. To balance these questions we also asked how many referrals were closed without a full investigation, this question was phrased in two different ways to see if the results differed.

The following questions were sent to all 207 council areas within the UK. 74 councils refused to answer any questions as they put all 44 questions together as one FOI request and then stated it would take longer than 18 hours to answer the questions. The reporter would like to clarify that the questions were sent in groups under separate FOI requests to try and avoid this.

Some council areas refused certain questions but answered others. The reporter would like to thank every council area that answered any of the questions asked.

Each question asked was selected from a much longer list of questions asked by parents and families in regards to child social services and other professional bodies. The questions were phrased in the best way possible to cover the many different ways the families were asking these questions. This was done in order to ascertain the miscommunication between the local authority and the families involved.

Hundreds, if not thousands of families find it difficult to understand why the local authority turn up at their doors telling them that a referral has been made from an anonymous phone call and they need to investigate these claims. These families never find out where these allegations originated from. Furthermore, these families can have recurring incidents of these anonymous referrals and this causes them emotional and mental strain, which, in turn also affects the mental and emotional well-being of the children concerned.

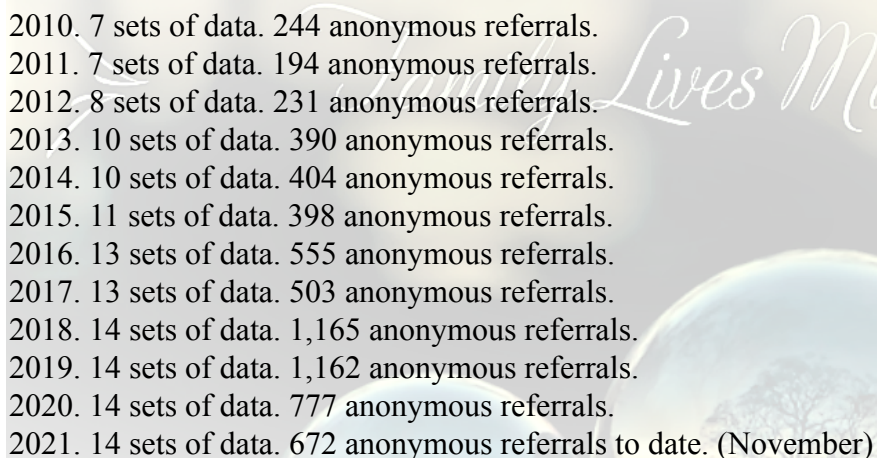
As the welfare of the child is the top priority of the local authority the reporter believes the effects of these anonymous and serial referrals needs to be investigated to ascertain just how much damage is caused to the child from these types of referrals.

Since 2010 how many anonymous complaints / allegations of abuse have child social services investigated per year by either calendar or financial year?

The reporter would like to thank every child social services council area who supplied statistics in relation to this question. Of the 207 council areas asked only 14 areas responded with statistics. 7 of these areas supplied statistics going back to 2010. 1 area supplied statistics going back to 2012, 2 supplied statistics going back to 2013, 1 area supplied statistics going back to 2015, 2 supplied statistics going back to 2016 and 1 area supplied statistics going back to 2018. These differences were dependant on the time these child social services areas started collating this information.

It is interesting to note that these 14 areas have decided to collate these statistics themselves as this information is not requested by the government as part of the yearly reports that child social services have to supply.

The reporter hopes that the other council areas will follow the example of these 14 and start to collate this information as it does give a very good overview of not only the amount of work that the social workers have to do but also the validity of these anonymous referrals when compared to results of other questions we put to these councils.



2010. 7 sets of data. 244 anonymous referrals.
2011. 7 sets of data. 194 anonymous referrals.
2012. 8 sets of data. 231 anonymous referrals.
2013. 10 sets of data. 390 anonymous referrals.
2014. 10 sets of data. 404 anonymous referrals.
2015. 11 sets of data. 398 anonymous referrals.
2016. 13 sets of data. 555 anonymous referrals.
2017. 13 sets of data. 503 anonymous referrals.
2018. 14 sets of data. 1,165 anonymous referrals.
2019. 14 sets of data. 1,162 anonymous referrals.
2020. 14 sets of data. 777 anonymous referrals.
2021. 14 sets of data. 672 anonymous referrals to date. (November)

The reporter would like to add that in 2018 one of these child social services areas received 514 anonymous referrals, which accounts for just over 50% of the total anonymous referrals received that year using the statistics available.

It would be very interesting to know how these areas compare to the rest of the UK and just how many anonymous referrals are made each year. It is also interesting to note that these totals increased dramatically in 2018 and how they still remained higher than pre 2017 during the pandemic.

The reporter accepts that the council who started collating data in 2018 has increased these yearly totals, which accounts for the dramatic increase from that year. As such there can be no realistic comparison prior to 2018. In order to accurately compare the yearly totals every council would need to collect this data and even then it would take around five years worth of totals to work out how bad this issue is and would need to be compared to the total number of referrals made each year.

In conclusion there is a need for each council area to start collecting this data as these totals refer to families being investigated and strain being placed on these families and social workers.

Do child social services investigate serial complainers for harassment? For example the same person or family continually call child social services raising concerns over a particular child/ren or family

As expected this question did not yield many responses apart from the: this is not a FOI request question, we do not hold this data, refused and the we investigate all reports of child abuse following the government guidelines no matter where the allegation originates from.

Thankfully, a few responses did elaborate further, although this elaboration was not exactly helpful. It would appear that the local authority believe it is down to the family to raise harassment charges with the police if they feel someone is constantly raising false allegations of abuse with child social services.

Yes, it is true that it is down to the police to investigate harassment as harassment is a crime. However, as noted from the previous question above the family is NOT told where these allegations originate from to begin with and there are high numbers of anonymous referrals.

As such, how can the family speak to the police to stop this kind of harassment when they are not given the information needed in order to take the perpetrators of this harassment to task?

This reporter has to laugh at the responses from the local authorities because this is a perfect example of child social services expecting the victim to stop the abuse, which of course they deny as being something they expect.

How can a family report harassment to the police in order to stop the abuse when the local authority is not supplying the information needed for the police to investigate?

This reporter thinks that this kind of information should be documented by the local authorities and if it is proven that the same individual or connected group of individuals are raising continued allegations of abuse towards a family or families then these serial complainers should be investigated themselves. Using the current protocols etc. in regards to serial complainers it is easy for an individual or group of connected individuals to persecute a family just because they don't get along. This of course has a knock on effect to the emotional and mental well-being of the children involved, who of course are supposed to be protected from this type of abuse.

At some stage the local authority needs to take some responsibility for this as it is their own rules that allow this to happen. If statistics were available it would be very interesting to find out how often this kind of family persecution happens at the hands of another person or family instead of child social services.

Child social services seem happy to accept the blame and criticism from families in regards to harassing them constantly over received allegations. If it could be proved statistically that the local authority is not only following government guidelines but also assessing where these allegations originate from then there is a possibility for families to stop accusing the local authority of 'having it in for them'.

Moreover, isn't it in the best interests of the child for the local authority to check the validity and motives behind these allegations. Especially when there could be malicious motives behind the allegations?

The local authority follows governmental guidelines so either the guidelines need to improve or the local authority need to decide to go above and beyond in this respect to safeguard the children involved from future emotional harm at the hands of outside, malicious forces.

How often, if at all do child social services close a case without investigating? statistics if available since 2010 by calendar or financial year.

How many allegations made to child social services are upheld without a full investigation or professional proof? How many are immediately investigated. Any statistics from 2010 by calendar or financial year are appreciated.

Due to the lack of responses and statistics on these two questions the reporter has decided to cover both at the same time.

The questions would appear straight forward enough and the reporter does accept that child social services believed these questions were in some way attacking them at a fundamental level or were accusatory in nature. This was not the reporters intention but it does show how the local authorities felt threatened by what they perceived as persecution and how they responded from a defensive stance.

Three councils actually supplied statistics which would answer both of these questions to some degree and 1 supplied percentages.

The first council supplied statistics on section 47 investigations and although the reporter will supply these totals they will not identify the area.

2013 = 616
2014 = 526
2015 = 565
2016 = 743
2017 = 745
2018 = 775
2019 = 756
2020 = 639
2010 = 670



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These numbers do not give the outcome of these investigations. However, it does prove that this council is investigating approximately the same number of section 47's on a yearly basis. It would be interesting to know if this is a country wide similarity or if this council is working above the national average of section 47's. The reporter thanks this council for these statistics.

Another council supplied a breakdown of statistics based on financial year. Again the reporter will include this data but not name the area.

2016/17 4,309 referrals made, 3,844 continued to investigation, 465 were no action needed, signposted etc.

2017/18 4,418 referrals made, 3,811 continued to investigation, 607 were no action needed, signposted etc.

2018/19 4,027 referrals made, 3,301 continued to investigation, 726 were no action needed, signposted etc.

2019/20 3,127 referrals made, 2,889 continued to investigation, 238 were no action needed, signposted etc.

2020/21 3,615 referrals made, 3,358 continued to investigation, 257 were no action needed,

signposted etc.

This is interesting statistics in regards to these questions and the reporter wishes to thank the local authority for supply this information.

Again, it would be beneficial to see where these statistics stack in relation to other areas and in relation to other statistics like number of anonymous referrals.

One child social services are supplied the following information by financial year. The reporter thanks this council for these statistics but will not name the area.

2019-2020 3,076 contacts resulted in advice and information only and 45 referrals resulted in advice and information only.

2020-2021 3,180 contacts resulted in advice and information only and 186 referrals resulted in advice and information only.

April – October 2021 1,965 contacts resulted in advice and information only and 55 referrals resulted in advice and information only.

When statistics are broken down like this it is easy to see how many referrals are easily closed from advice and information given. These statistics also show the number of contacts (possibly people calling in) who only need advise and information.

As always these statistics alone do not give an overview in regards to these questions and would need to be cross-referenced with other data like number of anonymous referrals.

Finally one council gave a percentage of cases that are closed the same day.

2019 91% of cases closed same day

2020 92% of cases closed same day

2021 98% of cases closed same day.

This appears to indicate that like the council above many of these contacts, referrals etc. simply need information, advice or signposting to other places.

It also indicates the number of contacts, complaints and referrals made to child social services that are easily resolved with this council.

Other responses were the normal type which stated this was an inflammatory, subjective question.

That they do not hold these statistics, refusals and accusing the questioner of trying to increase issues for the local authority. There were also responses that stated every allegation is investigated. No report is ever closed or upheld without investigation etc.

That all calls are triaged to see if they require further investigation or just advise. That government guidelines are always followed and the child is the most important aspect of everything they do.

In conclusion the reporter believes this is another situation where much more research and statistics are needed in order to evaluate the impact of the above questions on both the parents and children. Not forgetting that when dealing with so many calls and communication the social workers themselves are under a lot of pressure.

If statistics like anonymous and serial callers are investigated in relation to how many are dead ends or malicious this would help lower the pressure on everyone involved and the resources needed to deal with this.

The reporter also wonders how these child social services areas felt when faced with having to defend themselves against the phrasing of these questions and if by receiving these kinds of questions they now have a better understanding on how these families feel when they turn up at the door with accusations.

There need to be time invested now to alleviate problems, issues and a waste of resources in the future. The local authority need to reevaluate the way they deal with anonymous and serial complainers raising concerns of abuse. If the local authority can work with a better understanding of these issues and the impact on the families involved, especially the children this would go a long way to remove some of the stigma associated with child social services and the families would be more open to working with the local authority to protect their children.

For those of you reading this who have never had any interaction with child social services imagine how you would feel if you were accused of a crime that you have no way of proving you were not involved with. For example imagine you suddenly had the police turn up at your door accusing you of being verbally abusive in a public or private area but refused to tell you who made the allegation. How would you react if this happened on multiple occasions and you kept having to defend yourself against allegations that there was no way of proving or disproving and you were never told where these allegations came from.

The reporter thinks this could be taken one step further and suggest that families not knowing who have made these allegations is a breach of their human rights under the right to a fair trial. Admittedly an investigation is not the same as a trial, but the families should have the right to face their accusers. Especially, when this information could uncover malicious intent, harassment, parent alienation or other forms of abuse.

Maybe the government should rethink their policies relating to these issues as it could also lower the number of false allegations being raised to start with. This of course can only happen if the government knows how much of a problem this is and how many hours of wasted resources go into investigating these allegations. Research now to lower ongoing costs for the future and plug the holes these people are using to case issues.

This would also ultimately lower the stress and pressure on the local authority meaning less burnout, sickness and social workers leaving the profession. Lower the number of complaints

against child social services and improve the system as well as raise child social services profile with the public.

Before the professionals accuse the reporter of trying to implement a system where the public fear raising concerns for a child and putting children at risk please take into consideration that firstly these ideas are to lower the number of malicious allegations or serial call-ins from people who have nothing better to do than cause issues where none exist.

This is to lower the emotional impact the current system has on the children involved (which is or should be top priority).

This will also lower the stress and burden on the parents, which, will benefit the children within the house.

It will also help the social workers invest the much needed time to investigate the cases of severe abuse and save more children by lowering case loads, paperwork etc. giving more time for the families and children who actually need the help. As well as raising public opinion where child social services are concerned.

