



AUDIT COMMITTEE - 10TH SEPTEMBER 2014

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE COMPLAINTS POLICY

REPORT BY: INTERIM MONITORING OFFICER

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide Members with an update on the number of complaints received under the Corporate Complaints Policy for the period February to mid July 2014.
- 1.2 To advise Members whether any trends have been identified and if so the action to be taken.
- 1.3 To recommend to Members that in addition to the six monthly reports received, an Annual Report on the Corporate Complaints Policy is also presented to the Audit Committee going forward.
- 1.4 To update Members on the use of the Policy and Procedure to deal effectively with unacceptable, persistent or unreasonable actions by complainants.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 To monitor the corporate complaints received in order to provide information on the level of satisfaction of the services provided corporately by the Council. The result of the monitoring enables each department to focus on areas of concern, to improve services and to monitor performance and ensure that any trends in issues raised are identified and dealt with so as to be avoided in the future.
- 2.2 To ensure that corporate complaints are dealt with consistently and fairly across all service areas.
- 2.3 To update members on the implementation of the Policy and Procedure to deal effectively with unacceptable, persistent or unreasonable actions by complainants.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 Monitoring of the Council's corporate complaints and successful resolution of those complaints supports the provision of higher quality and more effective services to the public across all service areas.

4. THE REPORT

Background

- 4.1 Members will be aware from previous reports presented to Audit Committee on 17th September 2013 and 5th March 2014, that, on 1st April 2013, the Council implemented a new Corporate Complaints Policy (referred to as the Policy in this report) in order to reflect the model policy introduced by the Welsh Government.
- 4.2 The Policy has introduced a two-stage complaints process to be followed within the Council. Stage 1 complaints are intended to be dealt with within 10 working days and Stage 2 within 20 working days. If a complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of a Stage 2 response, he/she will have the opportunity to refer the matter to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.
- 4.3 Members were advised that a Learning from Complaints Group (referred to throughout this report as “the Group”) had been established, which is chaired by the Interim Monitoring Officer, and includes Complaints Officers from across the Council, the Council’s Senior Policy Officer (Equalities and Welsh Language) and a representative from the Council’s Performance Management Unit.
- 4.4 The Group meet on a quarterly basis in order to consider complaints statistics, identify trends and where appropriate review policies and procedures including the introduction of associated policies and procedures arising from the implementation of the complaints policy.
- 4.5 The result of the monitoring enables each department to focus on main areas of concern, to improve services and to monitor performance and ensure that any trends in issues raised are identified and dealt with so as to be avoided in the future. The Group’s findings are then reported to the Audit Committee on a six monthly basis.
- 4.6 This is the third report to Audit Committee on the Complaints Policy and is intended to inform Members of the implementation of the corporate complaints policy between the periods February 2014 to mid July 2014.

4.7 Review of Corporate Complaints

- 4.7.1 The data referred to below represents the number of complaints received from February 2014 to mid July 2014 for each Directorate referred to, together with an overview of the response timescales.
- 4.7.2 In addition, Members will be aware from the report received on 5th March this year, that in order to further improve and monitor the services provided, the complaints data captured now includes the outcome of each complaint; namely whether a complaint has been upheld, not upheld or partially upheld. An overview of the outcomes in respect of Stage 1 complaints are set out in paragraph 4.7.5 (c) and an overview of the outcomes in respect of Stage 2 Complaints are set out in paragraph 4.7.6 (d) below.
- 4.7.3 The total number of corporate complaints received across the Authority during this period is 115 comprising the following: -

	% of total number of corporate complaints received
12 Corporate	13.80
6 Education	6.90
48 Environment	55.20
39 Housing	44.85
4 Social Services	4.60
6 Other (cross Directorate)	6.90

4.7.4 The breakdown of the types of complaints are summarised as follows:-

4.7.5 Stage 1 Corporate Complaints

- | (a) Title | Actual |
|---|--------|
| Number of Stage 1 complaints received in Corporate Services | 10 |
| Number of Stage 1 complaints received in Education | 6 |
| Number of Stage 1 complaints received in Environment | 42 |
| Number of Stage 1 complaints received in Housing | 31 |
| Number of Stage 1 complaints received in Social Services | 4 |
| Number of Stage 1 complaints received Other (cross directorate) | 0 |
- (b) The total number of complaints received at Stage 1 were 93, of those 84 were responded to within timescale, 2 outside the timescale and 7 are ongoing.
- (c) Of the 86 Stage 1 complaints responded to, 28 have been upheld, 49 were not upheld and 9 have been partially upheld. Members will note 7 are ongoing. The breakdown of outcomes for each Directorate is listed below.

Outcomes of Stage 1 complaints

	Upheld	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Ongoing
Corporate Services	3	4	1	2
Education	-	6	-	-
Environment	15	19	3	5
Housing	10	16	5	
Social Services	-	4	-	-
Other (cross directorate)	-	-	-	-

4.7.6 Stage 2 Corporate Complaints

- | (a) Title | Actual |
|---|--------|
| Number of Stage 2 complaints received in Corporate Services | 5 |
| Number of Stage 2 complaints received in Education | 0 |
| Number of Stage 2 complaints received in Environment | 8 |
| Number of Stage 2 complaints received in Housing | 12 |
| Number of Stage 2 complaints received in Social Services | 1 |
| Number of Stage 2 complaints received Other (cross directorate) | 6 |
- (b) The total number of complaints received at Stage 2 were 32, of those 25 were responded to within timescale, 1 outside the timescale and 6 are ongoing.
- (c) Of the Stage 2 complaints, 22 were commenced at Stage 2 and 10 were escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2; 4 within Housing, 2 within Environment, 3 within Corporate Services and 1 within Social Services.
- (d) Of the 26 Stage 2 complaints responded to, 3 have been upheld, 15 were not upheld, and 8 were partially upheld. Members will note 6 are ongoing. The breakdown of outcomes for each Directorate is listed below.

Outcomes of Stage 2 Complaints

	Upheld	Not Upheld	Partially Upheld	Ongoing
Corporate Services	1	1	1	2
Education	-	-	-	-
Environment	-	5	2	1
Housing	2	7	1	2
Social Services	-	1	-	-
Other (cross directorate)		1	4	1

4.7.7 Members are reminded that the number of complaints listed for Social Services and Education are significantly lower than those of other Directorates such as Housing and the Environment. The reason for the difference is that this report only includes details of corporate complaints received for those service areas. Social Services operate a separate complaints policy for service users. Within Education the respective schools deal with their own complaints.

4.7.8 Equalities and Welsh Language complaints are monitored and reported to members of this committee as part of the overall figures but detailed information also forms part of the statutory annual reporting framework to the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the Welsh Language Commissioner's Office.

4.7.9 Members will note that the number of complaints responded to within the timescales is continuing to improve when compared with the data presented in the previous reports. This would appear to be as a result of officers becoming more familiar of the timescales for responding to complaints under the new policy and where necessary improving the way in which we keep customers informed with a view to achieving responses within the relevant timescales.

4.8 Review of Trends and types of complaints

4.8.1 At the recent meeting of the Group, officers considered the data collected during this reporting period for each specific department however no specific trends could be identified.

4.8.2 Types of complaints received have been wide ranging for example, waste collection, highway repairs and drainage issues, council tax, maintenance and housing repairs, pest control, planning issues, school transport, equalities and Welsh Language issues. The Group will continue to monitor this data closely at its meetings held quarterly and Members will be kept updated.

4.8.3 Whilst no trends have been identified during this reporting period the Group recognises the importance of learning from all complaints handled under the policy with a view to monitoring and improving outcomes for both future complainants and the Authority as a whole.

4.9 Proposals to present an Annual Report

4.9.1 Members are aware that the current Corporate Complaints Policy was implemented on 1st April 2013 and has therefore been in operation for in excess of one year. Members are asked to consider the recommendation set out in paragraph 9.1(b) of this report namely that the Audit Committee receive an Annual Report on the Corporate Complaints Policy, the first of which to be presented to the Committee following the expiry of the current year on 31st March 2015, which include an analysis of complaints received and outcomes.

4.10 Ombudsman referrals

4.10.1 Since the last report to the Committee 8 complaints have been referred to the Ombudsman following receipt of a response under Stage 2 of the Council's Corporate Complaints policy. The Ombudsman has decided not to investigate five of the complaints, and three are yet to be concluded. By way of additional information, the Ombudsman has now issued a draft Report to the Authority in relation to his findings following an investigation into an earlier complaint.

This Report is under consideration and if accepted will be reported to members in the usual way.

4.11 Update on the Introduction of a Vexatious Complainants Policy

4.11.1 Members will recall that the Policy was presented to and endorsed by Cabinet on 27th November 2013. As a result the Policy has now been introduced and circulated to service areas. It is also available to view on the Council's website.

4.11.2 Members are advised that to date there have been no referrals made under this policy although the Group will continue to monitor the use of the policy.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Monitoring of complaints via the Corporate Complaints policy addresses the Council's statutory duties under the Equalities Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011 and the Welsh Language Measure (Wales) 2011 in two ways

5.2 It addresses specific complaints to the Council around alleged discrimination by service areas and also addresses the monitoring of complaints from people who fall under the categories protected by the legislation in 5.1 above

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no direct financial implications associated with this report

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no personnel implications associated with this report.

8. CONSULTATIONS

8.1 The views of the consultees have been incorporated into this report.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 It is recommended that Members.

(a) note the contents of the report and;

(b) agree that Committee will receive an Annual Report on the Corporate Complaints Policy following the expiry of the current year on 31st March 2015.

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 To monitor the complaints process to ensure effective delivery of Council services.

11. STATUTORY POWER

11.1 Local Government Act 1972 - 2003.

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