



GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE - 16TH MARCH 2022

**SUBJECT: SIX MONTH UPDATE ON CORPORATE COMPLAINTS
RECEIVED FOR THE PERIOD 1ST APRIL TO 30TH
SEPTEMBER 2021**

**REPORT BY: HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES AND DEPUTY
MONITORING OFFICER**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Governance and Audit Committee with an overview of the complaints dealt with under the Corporate Complaints policy for the period 1st April to 30th September 2021 together with the outcomes and lessons learned. The report will also be presented to Cabinet.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report provides a summary of the complaints dealt with under the Corporate Complaints Policy for the period 1st April to 30th September 2021, the outcomes and lessons learned.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Committee is asked to note the complaints data contained in this report and to review and assess the effectiveness of complaints handling for this six month period.

4. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The Local Government and Elections Wales Act 2021 sets out provisions for the Governance and Audit Committee to "review and assess the authority's ability to handle complaints effectively and to make reports and recommendations in relation to the authority's ability to handle complaints effectively".
- 4.2 The guidance from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales also requires the data to be reviewed by Cabinet, hence the report will also be presented to a future meeting of Cabinet.

5. THE REPORT

- 5.1 On 19th March 2021 the Audit committee considered a report regarding the implementation of a new Corporate Complaints Policy based on guidance from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. The Committee provided comments on the draft policy which were considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 24th March 2021 who adopted the new policy along with an updated policy dealing with unacceptable and unreasonable actions by complainants under the complaints policy. The new Policy became effective on 1st April 2021 and is included within the background papers for information.
- 5.2 The Policy deals with corporate complaints only. There are separate complaints processes for dealing with social services complaints and school-based complaints. The Social Services Complaints Procedure Wales Regulations 2014 outlines the procedure for handling complaints from persons receiving a service from social services and school-based complaints are dealt with by the School and Governing Body. In addition, Freedom of Information complaints and complaints about Data Protection matters are within the remit of the Information Commissioner.
- 5.3 The Policy is not dissimilar to the previous policy in that it consists of an internal two stage process with the right for a complainant to refer the complaint to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales should they be dissatisfied with the response.
- 5.4 However members will recall that going forward greater emphasis would be placed on the way in which we record contacts and complaints under the policy. This step change is taking place with more contacts now being recorded under the policy. This will, in turn will have a positive impact in that it provides a more holistic platform from which we can recognise issues and trends more readily and learn from complaints both at directorate level and authority wide level where appropriate. This upsurge in recording is expected to continue particularly as more and more staff become more aware of their role in complaints handling.
- 5.5 To support this change members will be aware that the Complaints Officers in each Directorate received training from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales prior to the implementation of the new Policy. These officers maintain their directorates complaints data along with the provision of advice and support to their respective service areas, whilst the overall complaints database is maintained by the Corporate Complaints Officer based within Legal Services who is also the contact officer for the Ombudsman's office.
- 5.6 In addition, in October last year, over 80 staff were trained in complaints handling by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales and further training will be sought in the coming months. This training raised staff awareness in recognising a complaint and the process of recording the contact and dealing with it within the policy guidelines.
- 5.7 To streamline the processes internally and improve communications, Digital and Customer Services alongside the Complaints Officers are working with an external partner to design and implement a new Complaints system. This will help to both streamline controls and improve data records within the complaints process.

It is anticipated that the system will be ready for trial in the Spring of 2022. Complaints officers will participate in all elements of testing and provide feedback to ensure the process is fit for purpose before going live. The new system in the longer

term will improve data mining options and facilities to enable and secure appropriate management information reporting improvements, utilising the built in Complaints Dashboard for reporting key statistics. This will mitigate the need for multiple data systems held across each directorate, that require much administration and manual interrogation in order to produce meaningful intelligence and learning.

5.8 The Committee will also be aware that officers have a long established Learning from Complaints Group (“the Group”) comprising Complaints Officers from each directorate, the Corporate Complaints Officer, the Council’s Senior Policy Officer (Equalities Welsh Language and Consultation), representatives from the Council’s Corporate Policy Unit and a representative from the Council’s Internal Audit Section. These meetings are chaired by the deputy Monitoring Officer.

5.9 Following recent meetings the Group have discussed new ways of reporting the data and with the assistance of the Policy Unit a template has been created which has been utilised by the complaints officers for each directorate to report on their specific data. The intention of this new way of reporting is for members to be provided with a more in depth view of the complaints dealt with and the service areas affected. However members views and feedback would be welcomed on this new reporting structure which will be fed back to the Group in subsequent meetings. It is also timely to provide members with a fresh overview of the service areas within each Directorate given that a number of changes have occurred over recent years.

5.10 **General Overview**

The total number of complaints dealt with during the period 1st April to 30th September 2021 under the corporate complaints policy is **272** and is broken down as follows

Stage 1	218
Stage 2	11
Escalated from Stage 1 to Stage 2	43
Total	272

The Outcomes are as follows

Total Upheld complaints	94
Total Not upheld complaints	175
withdrawn complaints	3

Ombudsman referrals

During this period 21 complaints were referred to the Ombudsman; there were 2 early resolutions, 1 in housing 1 in planning and the remainder were not investigated.

5.11 **Detailed Data broken down by Directorate**

The data is broken down in more detail per Directorate in the following Appendices which are attached to this report.

Economy and Environment	Appendix 1
Housing	Appendix 2
Education and Libraries	Appendix 3

5.12 In addition to the data included in this report, the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales via his Complaints Standards Authority has been collecting information from all local authorities on the complaints dealt with and outcomes and the first quarter figures from April 2021 have been reported on their website via the following link <https://www.ombudsman.wales/published-statistics/>. Officers are continuing to provide this information on a quarterly basis.

5.13 Members will note from the data set out in the Appendices, that the Council is responding to complaints received in accordance with the provisions of the Complaints Policy but there is always room for improvement. A key part of the process to improve service delivery are the lessons learned and the subsequent monitoring of the actions agreed as part of the investigation outcomes. In this respect the Group will continue to develop and improve on its processes for monitoring the implementation of the lessons learned and ensure that authority wide lessons are shared as appropriate. Further training will also be sought from the Ombudsman to equip officers with any additional knowledge they may need to deal effectively with complaints.

5.14 **Conclusion**

Members are asked to consider and note the information contained in this report and Appendices.

6. **ASSUMPTIONS**

6.1 No assumptions are necessary as the content of the report is based on data collected and analysed.

7. **SUMMARY OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

7.1 As the report is for information only an Integrated Impact Assessment is not required.

8. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report

9. **PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 There are no personnel implications arising from this report.

10. **CONSULTATIONS**

10.1 The report has been circulated to the consultees listed below and any comments have been incorporated into this report.

11. STATUTORY POWER

11.1 Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Act 2019

Author: Lisa Lane Head of Democratic Services and Deputy Monitoring Officer

Consultees: Corporate Management Team
Robert Tranter, Head of Legal Services and Monitoring officer
Gemma Hoare, Senior Housing Officer (Customer Services)
Gareth Jones Housing Officer (Customer Services)
Karen Williams, Customer Services Digital Hub Manager
Rob Waggett, Customer Services Development Officer
Liam Miles, Customer Services/Complaints Officer
Nicola Broom, Complaints and Information Manager Social Services
Michelle Moore, Social Services Complaints and Information Officer
Ros Roberts, Business Improvement Manager
Andrea Jones, Corporate Complaints Officer
Anwen Cullinane, Senior Policy Officer (Equalities, Welsh Language and Consultation)
Deborah Gronow, Audit Group Manager
Karen L Williams, PA to Chief Executive
Leigh Brook, PA to the Director of Social Services and Housing
Lianne Fry, PA to Corporate Director Education and Corporate Services
Sian Wilkes, PA to the Interim Corporate Director of Communities
James Penfold, Transformation Manager
Ian Raymond, Business Improvement Officer

Appendices

Appendix 1 Economy & Environment
Appendix 2 Housing
Appendix 3 Education and Libraries
Appendix 4 Corporate Services
Appendix 5 Social Services (Corporate complaints only)

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Report to Audit Committee 19th March 2021

[Link to Report to Audit Committee 19th March 2021](#)

Corporate Complaints Policy

[Link to Corporate Complaints Policy](#)