



CABINET – 15TH NOVEMBER 2023

SUBJECT: ANNUAL REPORT ON THE CORPORATE COMPLAINTS RECEIVED FOR THE PERIOD 1ST APRIL 2022 TO 31ST MARCH 2023

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR FOR EDUCATION AND CORPORATE SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Cabinet with an overview of the complaints dealt with under the Corporate Complaints policy for the annual period 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023 together with the outcomes and lessons learned. This report will also be presented to a meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report provides a summary of the complaints dealt with under the Corporate Complaints Policy during the annual period 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023, the outcomes and lessons learned.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Cabinet is asked to note the complaints data contained in this report and to review and assess the effectiveness of complaints handling for the annual period 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023.

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 requires the data to be reviewed by Cabinet.

5. THE REPORT

- 5.1 By way of background, Cabinet at its meeting on 24th March 2021 adopted a new Corporate Complaints Policy (the Policy) along with an updated policy dealing with unacceptable and unreasonable actions by complainants under the complaints policy. The Policy became effective on 1st April 2021 and a copy is included at Appendix 1 of this report for members information. The report considered by Cabinet is also included as a background paper.
- 5.2 Cabinet received the first Annual Report on the complaints dealt with under the new Policy for the period April 2021/2022 at its meeting in October last year. This report sets out details of the complaints dealt with for the annual period from 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023 and will also be considered by a forthcoming meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee.
- 5.3 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. For completeness the report to the relevant scrutiny committee outlining the complaints dealt with under the Social Services complaints process for the same annual period is attached at Appendix 7 to this report. In addition, Freedom of Information complaints and complaints about Data Protection matters are within the remit of the Information Commissioner.
- 5.4 The Policy consists of an internal two stage process with the right for a complainant to refer their complaint to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales should they be dissatisfied with the response.
- 5.5 As part of the implementation of the Policy, complaints officers across the various directorates continue to raise awareness amongst their respective staff of the importance of recognising complaints and dealing with them in accordance with the Policy. One of the benefits of recording complaints more effectively is that we can recognise trends more readily and take steps to put things right and learn from any issues identified within the relevant directorate and beyond where appropriate.
- 5.6 In addition a cross section of officers from various departments have taken up the training offered by the Ombudsman. In 2021 the Ombudsman providing training to over 80 staff and further training was rolled out across the Directorates in February, April and May this year on complaint investigation skills and managing difficult behaviours and expectations. This training is further supported by the Complaints Officers within each Directorate who provide advice, guidance and support to their respective service areas on how to deal with complaints efficiently and effectively and are supported by the Corporate Complaints Officer based within Legal Services who maintains the overall database. The Corporate Complaints Officer is also the contact officer for the Ombudsman's office.
- 5.7 As part of the ongoing improvements to the way in which we hold and analyse complaints data, the testing of a new digital complaints system is ongoing with assistance from colleagues in Digital and Customer Services. The aim of the system is to streamline controls and improve data records within the complaints process. Adjustments are being made to the system as a result of the ongoing feedback with a view to launching the system when all checks have been completed. Until that time officers are continuing to utilise existing data systems which still require much

administration and manual interrogation in order to produce meaningful intelligence and learning.

5.8 To support the work of complaints officers and each directorate, 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. The meetings are chaired by the deputy Monitoring Officer and meet at least quarterly to discuss the complaints data and reporting procedures.

5.9 These meetings have resulted in the establishment of the formal template included at Appendices 2 to 6 which provides a more in depth information and analysis on all aspects of the complaints data and its relevancy to the service areas within the directorates.

5.10 General Overview

The total number of complaints dealt with during the period 1st April 2022 to 31st March 2023 under the Corporate Complaints policy is 456 and is broken down as follows:-

Directorate	Stage 1	Stage 2	Escalated	Total
Social Services	59	0	7	66
Education	5	2	1	8
Economy & Environment	157	17	28	202
Housing	132	3	25	160
Corporate	13	5	2	20
TOTAL	366	27	63	456

The Outcomes are as follows.

Directorate	Upheld	Not Upheld	Withdrawn	Ongoing	Total
Social Services	5	61			66
Education		8			8
Economy & Environment	127	73	2		202
Housing	52	93	15		160
Corporate	9	11			20
TOTAL	193	246	17		456

Ombudsman Referrals

Directorate	Number	Outcome
Social Services	1	Not Investigating
Education	3	Not Investigating
Economy & Environment	13	Not Investigating
Housing	12	Not Investigating
Corporate	5	3 Early Resolutions 2 Not Investigating
Unknown	4	Not Investigating

TOTAL	38	
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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 2
Housing	Appendix 3
Education and Libraries	Appendix 4
Corporate Services	Appendix 5
Social Services (Corporate only)	Appendix 6

5.12 Members will note that the data produced at Appendices 1-5 of this report outlines in particular the upheld complaints for each directorate. Whilst it is difficult to compare the types of complaints upheld between directorates, the Learning from Complaints Group were tasked with analysing their own data on upheld complaints to ascertain common themes which have arisen over and above the core categories identified within the Appendices.

5.13 With Education the issue was less clear as the service area had a small number of complaints which in the main related to the Additional Learning Needs and Inclusion service. These complaints centred on the implementation of the new curriculum for Wales which had led to confusion and frustration of some of our stakeholders, especially parents. In this respect the Council will continue to listen and adapt its processes in line with feedback.

5.14 However in terms of the Economy and Environment Directorate, the Housing Directorate, Social Services a key finding identified from this task was the issue of communication. This is also reflected albeit to a lesser extent in the complaint outcomes for the Corporate Services Directorate.

5.15 Communication itself is not framed or recorded as a complaint category as this issue often forms part of the main complaint for example a dissatisfaction with a decision which has been made. As such the communication issues are not fully reported within the data.

5.16 Further discussions within the Learning from Complaints Group identified the following communication issues which were running through many of the complaints which were upheld.

- Making contact with customers
- Not keeping customers informed or updated
- Lack of ownership or responsibility for communication and managing expectations
- Impression that the council is dismissive and doesn't care so there is no point
- Organisational or system issues
- Internal communication

5.17 It is recognised that we must act on this knowledge and use it as a positive opportunity to learn from experiences to drive continual organisational improvement. We strive to provide a fully rounded journey for every customer whether it be via the telephone, in writing or via electronic means. To this end,

complaints officers have assisted with the staff training for the complaints handlers within their respective service areas which it is anticipated will have a positive impact on the customer journey when interacting with the council and thereby aiding complaint handling. Staff across directorates have also attended the training sessions provided by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

5.18 Directors have also held Staff Engagement Sessions which also included training exercises and discussions around the customer journey and communication.

5.19 In addition, the digital software complaints database which is to be rolled out shortly will streamline our lines of communication and provide prompts where timeframes for responding need to be met or extended where further investigation is required.

5.20 In terms of Housing, the service are looking to make the webpages for Caerphilly Homes more user friendly for contract holders.

5.21 **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
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 [Link to - **Corporate Complaints Policy**](#)

Appendix 2 Economy and Environment

Appendix 3 Housing

Appendix 4 Education and Libraries

Appendix 5 Corporate Services

Appendix 6 Social Services (Corporate complaints only)

Appendix 7 Report to Scrutiny Committee re annual complaints dealt with under the separate Social Services complaints procedure

BACKGROUND PAPERS

[Link to Report to Cabinet 24th March 2021](#)