

Date: 19 October 2023

Councillor Chris Weaver,
Cabinet Member, Finance, Modernisation & Performance
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Dear Chris,

Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee: 19 October 2023

Thank you for sharing the Annual Complaints Report 2022/23 with the Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee. Following discussion, members have asked me to pass on their observations to inform Cabinet's consideration of the report. Please also pass on the committee's sincere thanks to Isabelle Bignall, Chief Digital Officer, Lowri Morris, Contact Centre Manager and Rory Williams, Complaints and Correspondence Manager, for presenting the report to committee and answering members questions. We applaud the enthusiasm and commitment in clear evidence from the experienced management team.

Standard Operating Procedure

The Committee was pleased that the Annual Complaints Report is viewed as an important indicator of customer service feedback, and the Council sees complaints as an opportunity for learning and identifying patterns. We note there is a standard operating procedure in place across the Council delivered by complaints leads in all service areas, to support the operating procedure, and the role of corporate complaints manager ensures consistency of response to complaints across all services. We also note that the procedure will benefit from a new corporate system, Halo, to be fully rolled out over the next few months. You kindly offered a further opportunity for scrutiny when this is fully implemented.

Accuracy of data

Members reflected that it was a little unclear whether all complaints are responded to within six months. We note officers believe this is the case but that the introduction of the Halo system will provide more information and allow accurate dip testing.

The 5-year picture

The Committee is reassured by the falling number of ombudsman cases, however observed that complaints in 2022/23, whilst lower than 2021/22, remain higher than five years ago. We note that the Council welcomes complaints but focuses on the number of customers that take closed complaints to the ombudsman as an indicator of its improved complaints procedure. You kindly offered to forward additional data on the number of complaints per population head compared with other Welsh Local Authorities.

Telling the whole story

Members reflected that there may be an opportunity in the Annual Complaints Report to identify and analyse areas of poor-quality service. We think there may be an opportunity for moderating complaints performance across service areas. We are also concerned that there is no reference to complaints recorded for Social Services in section 8 of the report. We note your explanation that Social Services are required to produce a statutory annual complaints report, however we consider as a key Council service it would be useful for this corporate report to include a summary of the Social Services complaints position. Members consider it would be valuable to view both reports side by side.

Complaints not upheld

The Committee highlighted that the percentage of complaints not upheld by the Council has significantly increased in five service areas this year. We note officers' response that complaints are often related to statutory responsibilities of the Council and therefore cannot be upheld. For example, Education and school admissions, where often a parent will complain if their child is not allocated a place at the school of their choice. We acknowledge this example of why a complaint might be upheld, however, we request more information on *why* the percentage has increased so much this year in your response please.

Equalities

Members consider it is important that an EIA is attached to complaints. We need to assess whether the Councils' most vulnerable residents have full accessibility to the complaints procedure, and who are mostly affected. This will enable us to assess

whether complaints are a consequence of underfunded services. On a positive note, we were pleased to hear that the digital deprivation team are active to ensure that the data gathered in the Ask Cardiff survey is widely reflective of Cardiff's residents. We are also pleased that EIA's have been re-introduced for complaints this year, and we request that they are included in the report next time.

Compensation

The Committee would like more information as to the cost of compensation paid out by the Council for complaints. We note this is a determination made by the Ombudsman and that where this is the case the sum is charged to the relevant service area budget. We request clarification of the amount of compensation paid out by the Council in 2022/23.

Requests following this scrutiny:

- A further opportunity for scrutiny when the Halo system is fully implemented.
- Additional information on the number of complaints per population head compared with other Welsh Authorities.
- More information on *why* the percentage of complaints not upheld by the Council has increased in five service areas this year.
- That you include EIAs for complaints in the next Annual Complaints Report.
- Clarification of the amount of compensation paid out by the Council in 2022/23.

Recommendations following this scrutiny:

To summarise, the Committee makes 1 formal recommendation following this policy development scrutiny, as set out below. As part of the response to this letter I would be grateful if you could state whether the recommendation is accepted, partially accepted or not accepted and summarise the Cabinet's response. If the recommendation is accepted or partially accepted, I would also be grateful if you could identify the responsible officer and provide an action date. This will ensure that progress can be monitored as part of the approach agreed by Cabinet in December 2020.

Recommendation	Accepted, Partially Accepted or Not Accepted	Cabinet Response	Responsible Officer	Action Date
That future Annual Complaints Reports include a summary of the Social Services complaints position.				

Finally, on behalf of the Committee, thank you once again for this pre-decision scrutiny opportunity. With your support, I look forward to continuing the valuable exchange between this Committee and the Cabinet. There are a number of requests and one recommendation following the scrutiny, and therefore I look forward to a response.

Yours sincerely,



**COUNCILLOR JOEL WILLIAMS
CHAIR, POLICY REVIEW AND PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

cc Members of the Policy Review & Performance Scrutiny Committee
 Leaders of Opposition Parties – John Lancaster, Rodney Berman & Andrea Gibson
 Chris Lee, Corporate Director, Resources
 Isabelle Bignall, Chief Digital Officer
 Lowri Morris, Contact Centre Manager
 Rory Williams, Complaints & Correspondence Manager
 Mr Gavin McArthur, Chair, Governance & Audit Committee
 Chris Pyke, OM Governance & Audit
 Tim Gordon, Head of Communications & External Relations
 Jeremy Rhys, Assistant Head of Communications and External Affairs
 Gary Jones, Head of Democratic Services
 Alison Taylor, Cabinet Support Officer
 Claire Deguara, Cabinet Business Manager
 Andrea Redmond, Committees Support Officer.
 Abbey King, Performance Lead.