

GOVERNANCE & AUDIT COMMITTEE: 20TH JULY 2021

ARRANGEMENTS FOR HANDLING COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS & DRAFT COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21

AGENDA ITEM: 8.2

REPORT OF THE CHIEF DIGITAL OFFICER

Reason for this Report

1. This report has been produced to enable the Governance and Audit Committee to review and assess the authority's ability to handle complaints effectively, and make any associated reports and recommendations.
2. The Governance and Audit Committee has incorporated the above responsibility into its terms of reference, as required in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

Background

3. The Council's Corporate complaints policy (found at Appendix C) reflects guidance given in the Welsh Government Model Policy and Guidance Paper for Handling Complaints. This Model Policy is further supported by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.
4. Complaints, comments and compliments can be made face-to-face or by telephone, email, letter or by using the online form found on the Council's website.
5. **Complaint received.** A complaint can be registered via any Council venue and once received, should be forwarded to the Service Area Complaints Manager. Every Council service area has a lead officer for complaints. The Complaints Manager will ensure complaints are acknowledged and recorded and facilitate the investigation of the complaint in accordance with the corporate complaints procedure.
6. **Acknowledgment.** The Complaints Managers will aim to acknowledge complaints within 5 working days. At this stage, we can let the customer know who is dealing with their complaint and our understanding of what the customer's complaint entails. We can also let the customer know that a full response will follow within 20 working days of our receipt of the complaint.

7. **Full response.** At the end of an investigation, a response should be produced depending on how a customer has indicated they prefer to be contacted. The response should include the outcome of the investigation as well as any necessary action taken for service improvement. The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales states that the aim of every formal investigation should be to “investigate once, investigate well”. Advice will also be included on the full response on what the complainant should do if they remain dissatisfied with the outcome – to contact the Ombudsman.
8. **Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.** Complaints that progress to the Ombudsman will have been thoroughly investigated by the service area. If a complainant remains dissatisfied, it is for the Ombudsman to assess whether there is any evidence of service failure or maladministration not identified by the Council.
9. **Compliments** are also recorded and as an organisation, we receive many positive comments about our staff and the services we provide. Knowing where things are working well and are appreciated is as important to capture as knowing where things are perhaps not working. Good practice and learning can then be circulated across the Council.
10. **Complaints relating to Councillors** (that a Councillor may have breached the Code of Conduct) should be addressed to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. The Ombudsman’s web site contains explanations on the standards of behaviour expected by the Code and the basis on which the Ombudsman decides whether or not to investigate a complaint.
11. The Council has also adopted a Local Resolution Protocol, in line with the recommendations of the Ombudsman, to deal with relatively ‘low level’ complaints made by another Member or Officer of Cardiff Council. Typically, these complaints will be about alleged failures to show respect and consideration for others as required by paragraph 4(b) of the Members’ Code of Conduct. Low level complaints made by members of the public about an alleged breach of the Code of Conduct by a councillor may also be dealt with under the Local Resolution Protocol if the Monitoring Officer agrees this is appropriate.
12. All Directorates are responsible for providing high levels of service to their customers, clients or residents. The Chief Digital Officer has strategic oversight of the corporate complaints and compliments process in line with their Council-wide customer service responsibilities.
13. In addition to the Council’s Corporate complaints policy, it is a statutory requirement for Local Authorities to have in place a complaints policy for Social Services. A copy of the Council’s Social Services complaints policy can be found at Appendix D. The Council also reports on the operation of the Social Services complaints policy and the report (Appendix B) contains information about the number and type of (Social Services) complaints received.

Issues

14. Details of complaints recorded by the Council under our Corporate process can be found in Appendix A.
15. A total of 2,537 (Corporate) complaints were recorded during 2020/21. This is an 11.2% decrease from the previous year, when 2,859 complaints were recorded.
16. A total of 1,964 compliments were recorded during 2020/21. This is an 16.2% decrease from the previous year, when 2,345 compliments were recorded.
17. During the year, increased pressures were placed on service areas across the Council as a result of Covid-19. Issues faced included a greater demand placed on Council services, adapting to Council-wide homeworking and staff shortages due to illness and self-isolation.
18. Whilst some service areas saw an increase in complaints due to these demands, it is encouraging to see that there has been an overall decrease Council-wide. However, it needs to be acknowledged that due to the covid restrictions some services stopped or were significantly scaled back during the year.
19. With regards to complaints recorded under the statutory Social Services complaints process, details can be set out in Appendix B. Adult Services received 64 complaints during 2020/21, exactly the same as the number of complaints recorded during 2019/20. Children's Services received 140 complaints during 2020/21, a small decrease compared to the 146 complaints received in 2019/20.
20. **Priorities** for the coming year include:
 - Council-wide complaints system
 - Improved complaints reporting
 - Improved compliments recording
 - Improved complaints training

Further information on these priorities can be found in the attached annual report (App A)

Legal Implications

21. Under Part 6 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, section 115, Governance and Audit Committees are given new statutory functions, with effect from 1st April 2021, to 'review and assess the authority's ability to handle complaints effectively', and 'make reports and recommendations in relation to the authority's ability to handle complaints effectively'.
22. The information set out in the report and appendices is provided for the Committee to review, assess and consider whether to make any recommendations in this regard.

Financial Implications

23. The financial implications (if any) arising from this report have been contained within the body of the report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 24.** That the Governance and Audit Committee considers and notes the content of the report and makes any comments or recommendations, as appropriate. We would invite Committee to provide any feedback on the draft complaints report(s) prior to them being considered at Cabinet.

Isabelle Bignall
Chief Digital Officer

The following is attached:

- Appendix A:** Draft (Corporate) Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 2020-21
- Appendix B:** Draft Social Services Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 2020-21
- Appendix C:** Corporate Complaints Policy
- Appendix D:** Social Services Complaints Policy