

Report

Cabinet

Part 1

Date: 16 November 2022

Subject **Annual Report on Compliments, Comments and Complaints Management 2021-2022**

Purpose To provide Cabinet with an overview of all Corporate and Social Services compliments, comments and complaints received during 2021/2022 and to make any recommendations for improvement to the report.

Author Head of People, Policy and Transformation

Ward All

Summary In May 2021 the Council's Cabinet agreed the new Compliments, Comments and Complaints policy for the Council. This report provides an overview of how the Council manages compliments, comments and complaints and the Council's performance in 2021/22. Complaints about schools are reported separately as they are subject to a distinct statutory framework, however, complaints about Education services such as administrative processes are included.

This report provides an overview for the year 2021/2022, broken down by service area and complaint types. The report highlights key trends and themes drawn from the data for consideration. In 2021/22 the Council received 208 compliments, 4267 comments and 321 complaints. 96% of complaints were resolved through the council's complaints process. The Public Service Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) intervened with 4%. The PSOW expresses that the focus is not on keeping complaints to a minimum but giving customers various platforms in which to raise their concerns.

The report also reflects on lessons learned for the council to improve and actions to deliver these improvements. These include more engagement with service areas to develop an understanding of the work of the Ombudsman and also the importance of more structured training which would be beneficial at both employee induction and on-going annual refresher training.

Proposal Cabinet is asked to consider the contents of the report regarding the process and performance of the Council's corporate compliments, comments and complaints annual report 2021/22 and make any recommendations for improvement to the annual report.

Action by Complaints Resolution Manager

Timetable Immediate

This report was prepared after consultation with:

- Governance & Audit Committee
- Chief Financial Officer
- Monitoring Officer
- Head of People, Policy and Transformation

Signed

Background

In May 2021, the Governance and Audit Committee agreed new terms of reference to align with the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. One of the new requirements of the Committee is to: *Make reports and recommendations in relation to the authority's ability to handle complaints effectively.* This is the second report provided to the Committee and gives an overview of how the Council manages Compliments, Comments and Complaints and the annual report on the Council's performance in 2021/22. All annual statistics and corporate actions for improvement are included in the Annual Governance Statement and Annual Corporate Well-being and Self-Assessment Report.

The policies and procedures in place for Compliments, Comments and Complaints comply with the legislative requirements of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 and associated standards, specifically ensuring that the Council promote the 'Active Offer'. Social Services statutory requirements remain in operation alongside the Corporate Policy to ensure they are aligning with; Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014 and the Representations Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014, ("the Regulations").

In May 2021, the [Council's Cabinet](#) approved the Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy which is aligned based to the guidance issued by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. Work is continuing with our on-line forms and improvements on the way we collate complaints data.

The Ombudsman's Principles of Good Administration and Good Records Management focus on six principles:

- Getting it right: In accordance with the law and authority's policy and guidance. Providing appropriately trained and competent staff.
- Being customer focused: ensuring people can access services easily. Informing customers what they can expect. Responding to customers' needs flexibly, including, where appropriate, co-ordinating a response from other service areas.
- Being open and accountable: Be clear about policies and procedures, provide clear and accurate advice. Taking responsibility.
- Acting fairly and proportionately: Treat people with respect and courtesy without unlawful discrimination, ensuring no conflict of interests.
- Putting things right: Acknowledge mistakes and apologise. Put things right quickly and effectively with information on how to appeal.
- Seeking continuous improvement: Review policies and procedures regularly to ensure they remain effective. Asking and utilising feedback to improve services and improvement
- Creating good quality records: Keeping records accurate and up to date.

The new powers created under the Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Act 2019 include.

- Accepting complaints verbally, not just in writing.
- Investigating complaint handling when a patient's National Health Service (NHS) care is inextricably linked with private healthcare.
- The ability to undertake 'own initiative' investigations when the Ombudsman considers them to be in the public interest.
- Gathering complaints data from public services in Wales on a quarterly basis (**Complaints Only**).

The Ombudsman's annual letter is appended to this report.

Compliments, Comments and Complaints Annual Report 2021/22

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the Compliments, Comments and Complaints for Newport City Council for the year 2021/2022. Complaints data recording is captured through My Council Services. Data is separated to provide detail for Corporate and Social Services Compliments, Comments and Complaints.

The report contains Public Services Ombudsman of Wales (PSOW) statistics and details where action is required by the council to address weaknesses and make improvements. Service development information outlining progress made in 2021/22 is provided and Actions for Improvement are set out for 2022/23.

Compliments, Comments and Complaints are submitted through various channels, customers can log these via the Newport City Council My Council Services App, via email or through our Contact Centre. These are acknowledged via My Council Services by the Complaints Resolution Officers and all correspondence is stored securely in one place. The Complaints Resolution Team collaborate with and provide support to all service areas to enable them to appropriately when administering responses to customers. We ensure that timescales are adhered too and work with service areas to implement lessons learned.

The Council accepts complaints providing they are submitted within 12 months. This is because it is better to look into concerns while the issues are still fresh in everyone's mind. We may, in exceptional circumstances, look at concerns which are brought to our attention later than this. However, we would ask for evidence as to why this wasn't brought to our attention earlier. In any event, regardless of the circumstances, we will not consider any concerns about matters that took place more than three years ago.

The Complaints Resolution Team provide a comprehensive service for Corporate and Social Services Complaints. In the final quarter of 2022, The Complaints Resolution Team moved service area from City Services to People, Policy and Transformation in the corporate centre. In 2022/23 The Complaints Team will be evaluating and reviewing our processes to streamline them, whilst ensuring equity of support across service areas and maintaining a consistent quality of service.

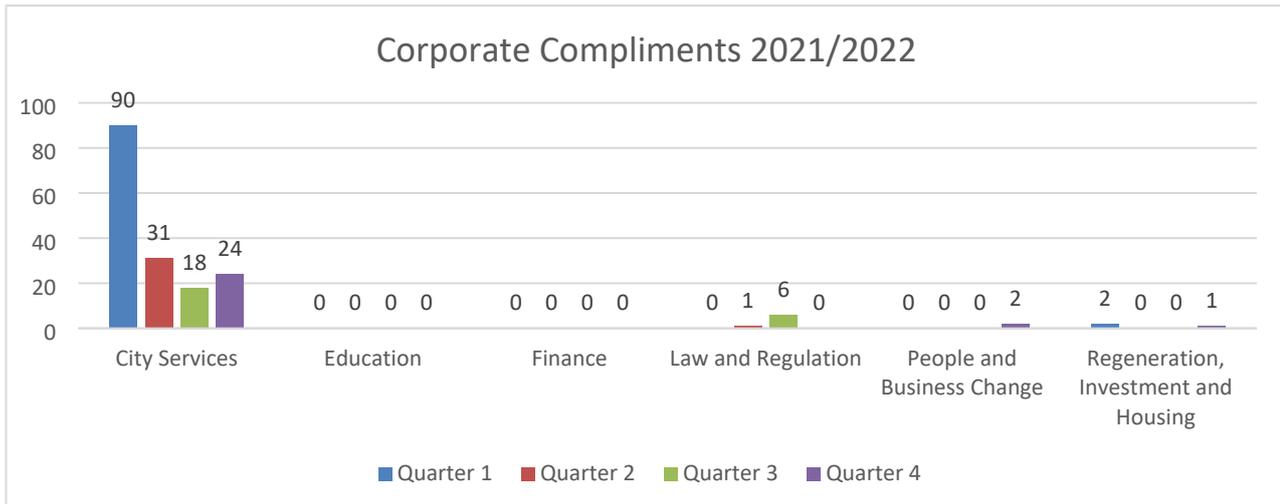
COMPLIMENTS

Compliments Corporate

A total of 175 Corporate Compliments were recorded in 2021/2022, 0.5 % increase since 2020/21. The opportunity to provide positive feedback is accessible to residents using improved webforms, the Council app or directly through customer accounts.

City Services received most of these compliments which is largely due to the high visibility of these services to the public and high number of interactions with residents.

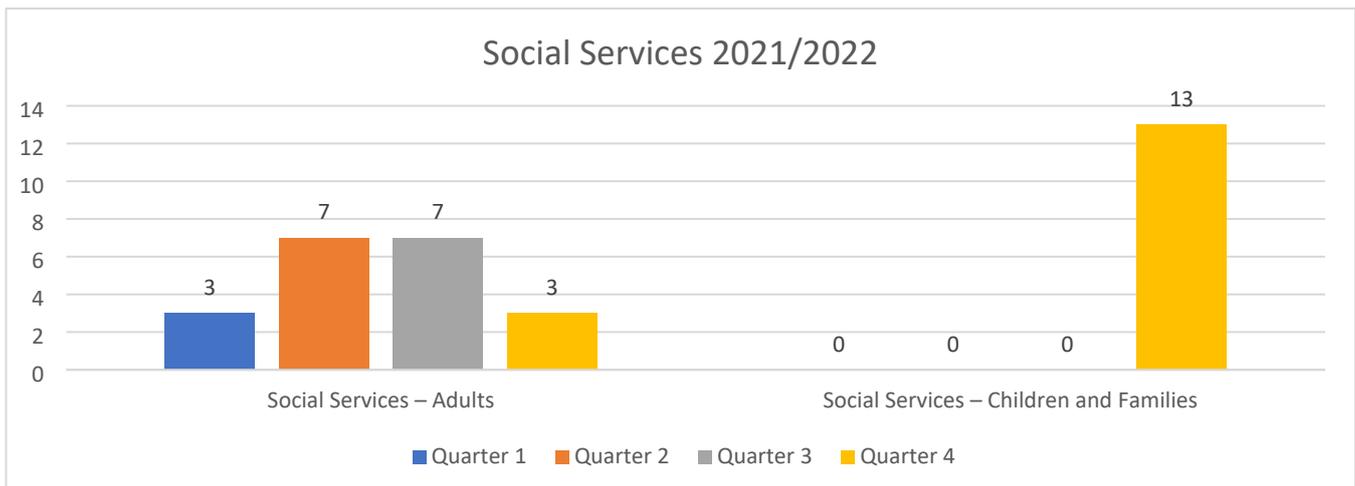
The graph below represents the number of compliments received by each corporate service area.



Compliments Social Services

A total of 33 compliments were received for Adult Social Services during 2021/22. 61% for Adult Services and 39% compliments for Children’s Services were received during this timeframe.

The graph below shows the breakdown:

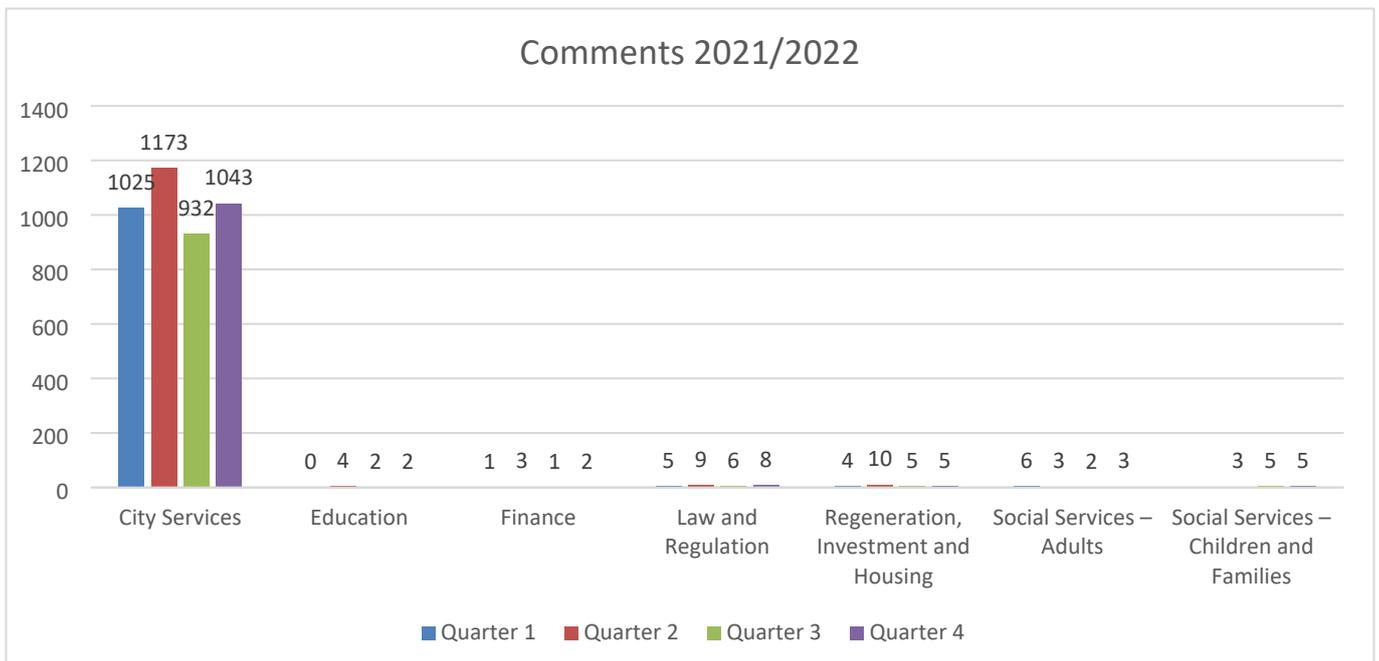


COMMENTS

4,267 comments were recorded during 2021/22. Comments are recorded where a resident is dissatisfied with a policy or decision made by the Council that has been implemented or applied correctly. For example, residents may be unhappy with the scheduled number of grass cuts in the city. In line with the Ombudsman’s guidance this feedback is recorded and if appropriate, responded to, but is not recorded as a complaint.

This record is the highest we have seen and it’s an increase of 37% since 2020/21. In July 2022 changes were made on My Council Services to allow Complaints Resolution Officers to update the category items are logged under, as this can be done by the customer themselves or by colleagues within the contact centre. We identified there were complaints and requests for service that were logged under comments. Measures are now in place so that we can ensure we capture and evidence information correctly.

Similarly, to Compliments, the highest number of Comments recorded are for City Services in line with the visibility of the services they provide, which is shown below.



COMPLAINTS – Corporate Summary

| Year | Stage 1 Complaint | Stage 2 Complaint | Stage 2 Complaint % | Ombudsman Complaint | Ombudsman Complaint % |
|-----------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 2017/2018 | 284 | 24 | 7.79% | 37 | 13% |
| 2018/2019 | 271 | 28 | 9.36% | 38 | 14% |
| 2019/2020 | 354 | 33 | 8.53% | 31 | 8.76% |
| 2020/2021 | 261 | 39 | 9.50% | 14 | 7.73% |
| 2021/2022 | 271 | 31 | 11.44% | 24 | 8.85% |

Figures overall are in general higher in the first quarter. In line with other Local Authorities, we have seen an increase since the relaxation of Covid restrictions.

For Waste and City services most complaints for waste and city services involved failure to provide service and delays in providing service. Newport City Council are supporting Wastesavers to update their technology to improve service delivery introducing in-cab technology, this will assist teams to locate properties and waste improving efficiency.

Ground maintenance experienced an increase during quarter 1, complaints centred around No-Mow May, with residents raising concerns over grass cutting.

Transport and roads complaints experienced an increase during quarter 2, this is a seasonal trend where complaints about walking routes, taxi and school transport are higher during this time of year.

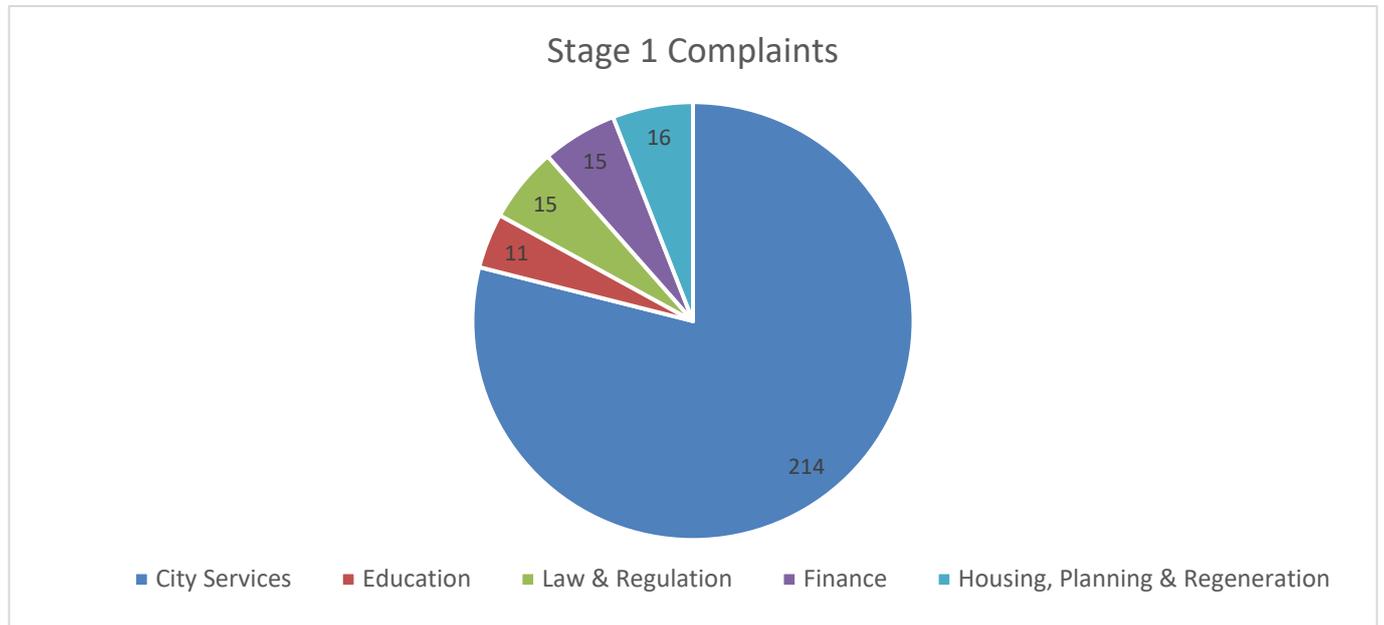
Contact centre complaints during the period 2021/2022 were influenced by a number of factors. Customer Services had a higher than average attrition rate during this time, with extremely knowledgeable and experienced Customer Service Officers taking positions within other council departments. This led to fewer Customer Service Officers taking calls whilst recruitment and training took place, along with calls taking longer due to less experienced officers assisting callers with their queries.

Correspondence from the Council Tax Department sent to those residents in arrears saw a significant increase in calls on the Council Tax line, this line is manned by 2 Contact Centre Officers at any one time. Correspondence includes the initial Council Tax bill, sent at the beginning of March to every household in Newport. If payments aren't received reminders, final reminders and final notices are sent to households. During these times, call wait times would often exceed 60 minutes, leading to complaints. In addition to this, call volumes increased due to additional financial assistance the Council was providing to residents and businesses due to the pandemic, leading again to longer call wait times.

Contact Centre Staff began working from home in March 2020 and they reported experiencing a number of telephony issues which their service providers are still working to resolve. Issues include calls being prematurely terminated by the system whilst in the queue to be answered and either the caller or the Customer Service Officer not being able to hear the other person. The service provider will be carrying out a system upgrade shortly which should resolve a lot of the existing issues that has caused frustration for the residents of Newport.

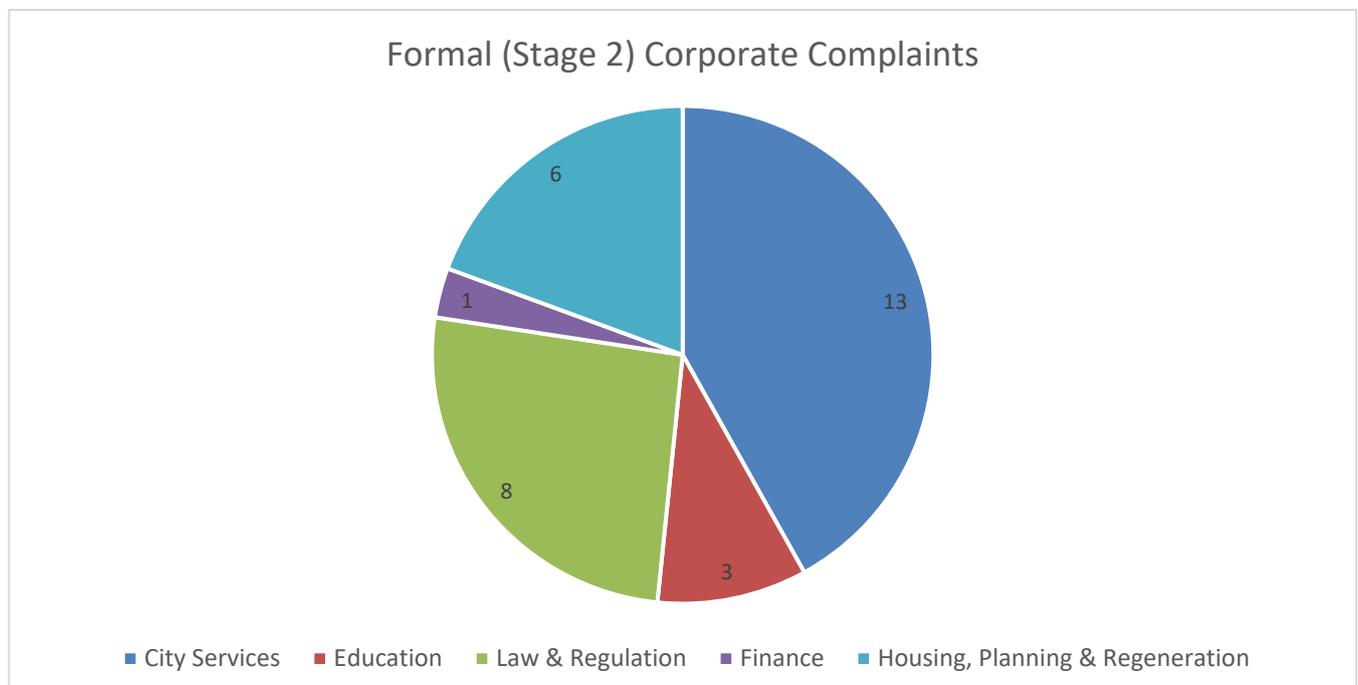
Informal (STAGE 1) - Corporate Complaints 2021/22

The breakdown below represents a total of 271 stage one complaints by service area for 2021/22, a 3.6% increase since 2020/21.



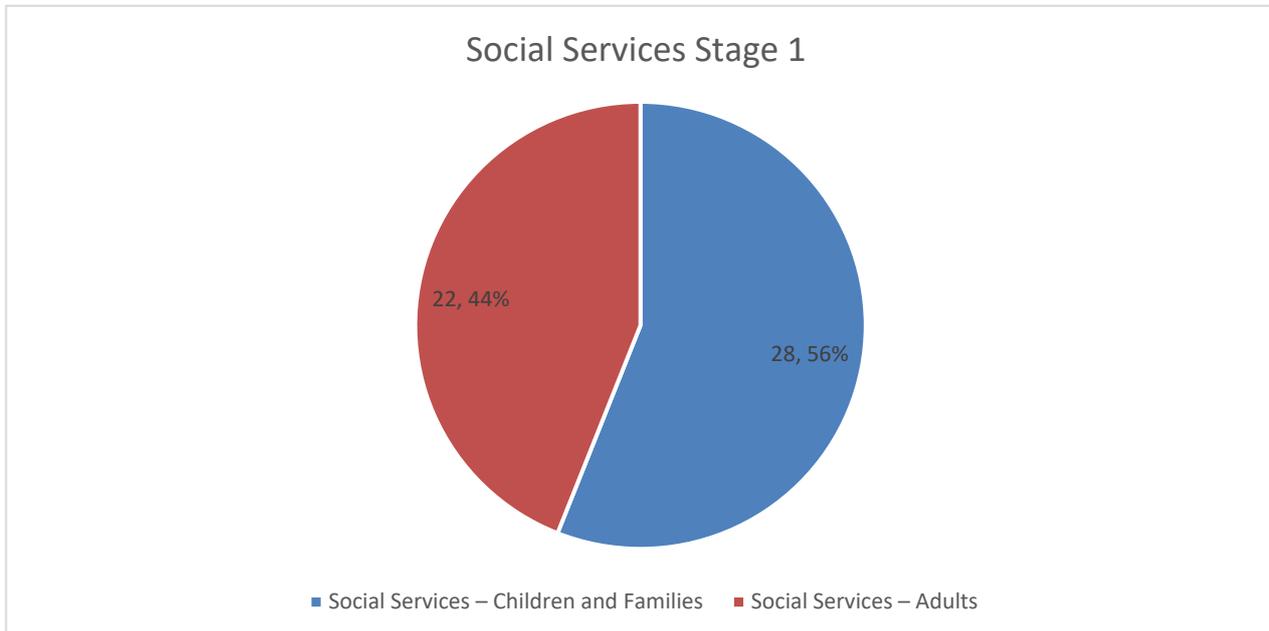
Formal (STAGE 2) Corporate Complaints 2021/22

The breakdown below represents a total of 31 stage 2 complaints received by service area for 2021/2022 compared with 2020/21 this demonstrates a 20% reduction in complaints received.



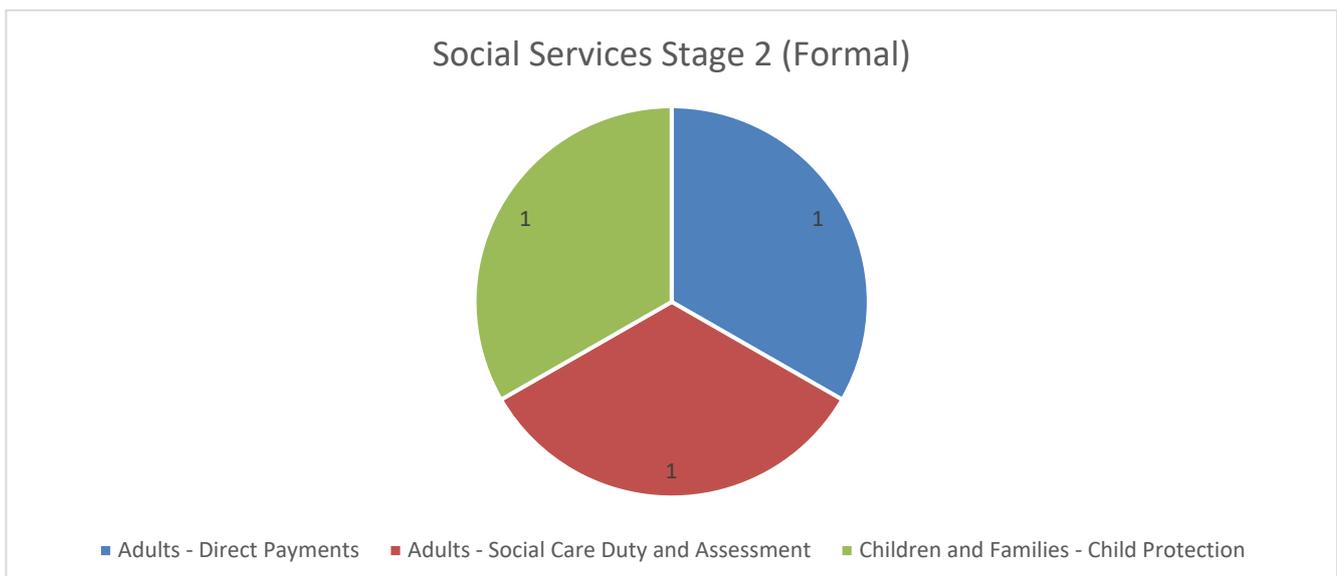
Social Services Complaints

The chart below represents a total of 50 informal stage 1 complaints received in 2021/2022, this is an increase of 36% since 2020/21. The highest number of complaints received involved Social Care Duty and Assessment.



Social Services Stage 2 Investigation

There was a total of 3 formal stage 2 Social Services complaints received in 2021/2022, this a significant decrease of 50% since 2020/21.



Ombudsman Corporate Complaints

During 2021/2022 the Ombudsman reviewed 5 corporate complaints. This number does not include the total number of complainants whose complaints the Ombudsman declined to investigate. To follow is a summary of the outcome of those investigations:

Detailed below are areas where Newport Council needed to act:

Planning Early Settlement was following a customer's dissatisfaction around poor communication. As a result, there were delays that meant that there was a missed opportunity to appeal a decision. As part of the early settlement, Newport City Council agreed to waive any fees for the resubmission of a planning application.

The complaint regarding Trading Standards was that Newport Council had ceased an investigation into which there was evidence that had not been considered. Trading Standards were asked to examine this evidence and resume its investigation.

As a result of another Ombudsman investigation, it was identified that possible improvements could be made with regards how post is received, distributed, and recorded within the Civic Centre. To reach an early resolution for this case a full review was undertaken reviewing mailroom processes.

There were 2 cases where additional training needs were identified, and apologies issued to residents.

Ombudsman Social Services Complaints

During 2021/2022 there were no Ombudsman Social Services complaints made.

Complaints to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW)

The Annual letter for 2021/2022 (attached) acknowledges the number of complaints referred to them regarding Local Authorities increased by 47% (compared to 20/21 figures) and are now well above pre-pandemic levels. It is likely that complaints to the Ombudsman, and public services in general, were suppressed during the pandemic, and we are now starting to see the expected 'rebound' effect.

Each quarter all local authorities in Wales report to the Ombudsman. The table below represents the last 5 years key information that has been reported back via the Ombudsman's Annual Letter.

Despite the increase in new complaints received for 2021/22, PSOW intervention has decreased by 6% compared with 2020/21.

| Year | New Complaints Received by NCC | Received per 1000 Residents | Cases with PSOW Intervention | % of Interventions | Code of Conduct Complaints | Community Council Code of Complaints |
|---------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|--|--|
| 2017/18 | 37 | | 8 | 24% | 3 (closed) | 3 (closed) |
| 2018/19 | 38 | | 7 | 16% | 3 (closed) | 0 |
| 2019/20 | 39 | 0.25 | 4 | 11% | 5 (closed) | 1 (closed) |
| 2020/21 | 31 | 0.20 | 5 | 17% | 2 (no evidence of breach) | 1 (no evidence of breach) |
| 2021/22 | 40 | 0.26 | 4 | 11% | 4 (2 no evidence of breach, 1 discontinued, 1 referral to Standards Committee) | 9 (3 discontinued, 3 no evidence of breach, 3 no action necessary) |

The Complaints Standards Authority have published data to the PSOW website for the first time and this may be something as an Authority we would want to replicate.

Although the Ombudsman are continuing to offer free training to all Officers, there are currently no available dates due to rolling out training to the NHS. The Complaints team have designed an online training package which has 6 e-learning modules. Following the easing of COVID restrictions the team intend to combine e-learning and face to face delivery, we will be prioritising delivery toward the Autumn 2022. The team will also be involved in all induction training into the Authority to explain the importance of complaint handling, identifying missed opportunities and learning from these and the role that the Ombudsman plays.

PSOW continue to express that Authorities and other organisations should not view complaints as a negative thing. If complaints are too low questions may be asked around whether our processes are clear enough and whether customers are given enough opportunities and access points to raise these concerns. Therefore, the Ombudsman do not provide benchmarking.

A new Public Service Ombudsman was appointed in Spring 2022 and it was noted in their annual letter that the number of complaints referred to them regarding all Local Authorities increased by 47% (compared to 20/21 figures) and are now well above pre-pandemic levels.

We will continue to engage with the PSOW Complaints Standards work, accessing training for our staff, fully implementing the model policy, and providing complaints data.

Service Development

The Council is committed to developing the service provided to meet the legislation and to meet the expectations of residents who wish to submit their feedback.

Progress made in 2021/2022:-

- Transition to a new service area, moving from City Services to People Policy and Transformation in the corporate centre.
- Recruitment of cover for the Complaints Resolution Manager in June 2022.
- Developed training modules concerning complaint management and customer service that all officers can access. Due to significant staff shortages and the reallocation of staff to support core front line services, much of this work is being carried forward into 2022/23.
- Introduce a continuous improvement approach so that the feedback and lessons learnt from complaints can be tracked through to service improvements. Further work collaborating with the Digital Projects Manager to review our digital processes will take place in Autumn 2022.
- We remain part of the officer and member Strategic Equalities Group and work will continue throughout 2022/23.

During 2022/2023 we will continue to work with service areas and review our processes with the customer services My Newport team. We recognise there are too many options available when closing complaints and this may be impacting on the quality of data being extracted. To remedy this, we have recently introduced a priority capture icon which supports the Complaints Officers to identify, categorise and prioritise work.

The team will certainly benefit from our recent transition to the Digital Services section. Plans are in place to review our data capture and demonstrate our impact ensuring we capture the service user journey as effectively as possible.

We are currently reviewing our customer journey pathway with a view to making a few adjustments which will benefit customers and colleagues when they are engaging with us.

The Unacceptable Actions by Customer Policy supports staff to deal with all customers in ways which are demonstrably consistent, fair and reasonable. The Policy sets out how we will decide which customers will be treated as abusive, unreasonably persistent, and what we will do in those circumstances. This policy will be reviewed in 2022/23 to reflect changes due to the move of service area.

Lessons Learned

- Support service areas to increase confidence in responding to complaints and following processes in line with our Service Level Agreement.
- More service area engagement to increase level of understanding in terms of the Ombudsman's powers and what they are looking to achieve.
- More supplier engagement to increase level of understanding of the Ombudsman. This is a significant piece of work that will be rolling year on year.

Actions for Improvement

The table below outlines the actions that the team is undertaking in 2022/23 to improve the delivery of the service.

| Action | Anticipated Completion date |
|--|-----------------------------|
| Roll out hybrid training to officers using Teams and e-learning to support effective complaint handling. Also contribute with induction training for new starters including reviewing onboarding and offboarding processes for talent and succession planning. | December 2022 |
| Review My Council Services reporting functions and streamline recording including supporting colleagues in the Contact Centre to capture effective data. | September 2022 - rolling |
| Collaborate with relevant Council teams to analyse complaint demographics to seek further opportunities for improvement. | October 2022 |
| Increase consistency and standardise digital complaints processes in collaboration with Digital Services adopting a multidisciplinary approach. | July 2022 - ongoing |
| Support and develop service areas to respond to complaints and follow processes in line with our Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy. | July 2022 – ongoing |
| Review and update the Unacceptable Actions Policy | November 2022 |
| Improving accessibility for disadvantaged and vulnerable customers particularly those who are digitally excluded or have accessibility issues | January 2023 - ongoing |

Financial Summary

There are no financial implications associated with this report

Risks

| Risk | Impact of Risk if it occurs* (H/M/L) | Probability of risk occurring (H/M/L) | What is the Council doing or what has it done to avoid the risk or reduce its effect | Who is responsible for dealing with the risk? |
|---|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| Failure to comply with the requirements of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales in dealing with complaints | H | L | The Council has. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All policies have been reviewed in line with Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Act 2019 | Complaints Resolution Manager Digital Services Manager |
| Failure to meet the public's expectation for dealing with complaints | H | L | The Council has. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consulted with the public to find out what is important to them relating to complaints and complaint handling Consulted with Officers to find out what support is needed to help them respond to complaints effectively | Complaints Resolution Manager Digital Services Manager |

Links to Council Policies and Priorities

[NCC Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy](#)

Options Available and considered

1. To consider the contents of this report for the Authority, providing any additional comments and/or recommendations for future reports.
2. To request further information or reject the contents of this report.

Preferred Option and Why

1. Option 1 is the preferred option to provide any additional comments and/or recommendations for future reports

Comments of Chief Financial Officer

There will be no financial impact as a result of this report. Any recommendations for improvements will need to be considered using existing budget provision.

Comments of Monitoring Officer

There are no specific legal issues arising from the report. The Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 changed the statutory terms of reference of the Governance and Audit Committee to include responsibility for reviewing and assessing the Council's ability to handle complaints effectively and to make reports and recommendations in relation to effective complaints handling. This report provides an overview of the comments, compliments and complaints received by the Council during 2021/22 and how they were dealt with and also includes the Ombudsman's annual performance letter.

The Council's Corporate Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy complies with the guidance issued by the Ombudsman in relation to the handling of complaints, while the statutory social services complaints procedures are in accordance with the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014 and the Representations Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014.

Governance and Audit Committee are asked to consider the effectiveness of the Council's complaints-handling procedures and to make any recommendations to Cabinet for improvement. Any individual actions arising from the complaints are matters for the relevant officers and Cabinet Members

Comments of Head of People, Policy and Transformation

The Council has a responsibility for ensuring that services are provided to a satisfactory level to its users and that we ensure continuous improvement where issues have been raised. This report provides an overview of how we have performed in 2021/22 and where we need to improve on how we manage compliments, comments and complaints in the organisation. The Council actively promotes citizen engagement within its operations to act in a more preventative way and promote citizens involvement in its services.

There are no HR implications relating directly to this report. The action plan for 2022/23 outlines how we will ensure improvements are made to managing complaints and customer service.

Comments of Cabinet Member

The overall issues raised by Committee Members are noted and in general, all the data obtained would link in with the Newport Intelligence Hub to understand further what complainants are telling us about the services which is key to understanding trends. It is important to treat complaints as a resource and provide detailed feedback to residents. Compliments also need to be addressed and included in the complaints, once the data was complete this could be linked into Equalities which was also raised.

Local issues

This report is relevant to all wards.

Governance and Audit Committee

The Governance and Audit Committee considered the contents of the Council's Compliments, Comments and Complaints Annual Report 2021/22 including processes and performance. Members made recommendations for improvement to the annual report which were noted in the minutes.

The feedback from Governance and Audit Committee included a request to provide an update to this Committee in six months on the action plan included in the report. It also suggested that further insight from the complaints data should be sought and included in future reports. It requested that the Annual Letter from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales is attached to the annual report for future updates.

Equalities Impact Assessment and the Equalities Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 contains a Public Sector Equality Duty which came into force on 06 April 2011. The Act identifies a number of 'protected characteristics', namely age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation; marriage and civil partnership.

The report notes that the Council records all complaints where the customer believes they have experienced unlawful discrimination, and other conduct that is prohibited by the Act. This information is reported in more detail in the Equalities Annual Report.

Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

This report enables Members to monitor the current position of the council's performance, this helps to drive improvement over the short and long-term and prevent poor performance.

Performance measures are also reported through the service plans and the improvement plan, which take into account the sustainable development principle promoted in the Act and the five ways of working; long-term, prevention, integration, collaboration and involvement.

Any changes to service provision as a result of feedback received would consider the five ways of working and the sustainable development principle as part of the decision making process.

- Long term: the actions being put into place will ensure that the Council is able to respond to feedback and complaints now and in the future.
- Prevention: Understanding what is important to residents and why we have received complaints will help the Council to make improvements that prevent similar complaints from occurring again.
- Integration: Reviewing the Council's policies regarding feedback from residents will help to ensure that the principles of the Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Act 2019 are embedded in service provision.
- Collaboration: the approach to responding to feedback from complainants requires collaboration across the Council. All service areas receive and deal with complaints and their feedback as part of consultation will inform the development of training, guidance and support.
- Involvement: Public consultation has provided valuable insight into what is important for customers when they are unhappy with a service provided by the Council. This will be used to inform the development of training, guidance and support.

Background Papers

Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy

Governance and Audit Committee minutes

Annual Report on Compliments, Comments and Complaints Management 2020-2021

Ombudsman's annual letter (attached)

Dated: 4th November 2022