

# Report



## Governance & Audit Committee

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### Part 1

**Date:** 30<sup>th</sup> March 2023

**Subject** **Complaints, Comments and Compliments – follow up report**

**Purpose** To provide an update on the progress of the actions for improvement that were reported to Governance & Audit Committee in September 2022

**Author** Complaint Resolution Manager

**Ward** All

**Summary** The report provides Governance and Audit Committee with an update on actions for improvement that were included in the Annual Report Comments, Compliments and Complaints 2021/22.

**Proposal** To consider the updates within the report and obtain as necessary any assurance on progress to date.

**Action by** Head of People, Policy & Transformation  
Digital Services Manager

**Timetable** Immediate

This report was prepared after consultation with:

- Chief Financial Officer
- Monitoring Officer
- Head of People, Policy and Transformation

**Signed**

## Background

In September 2022, the Annual Report on Comments, Compliments and Complaints was presented to the Council's Governance Audit Committee. The report provided an overview of how the Council manages compliments, comments and complaints and the Council's performance in 2021/22. The report provided an overview for the year 2021/2022, broken down by service area and complaint type. In 2021/22 the Council received 208 compliments, 4267 comments and 321 complaints and 96% of complaints were resolved through the council's complaints process. The Public Service Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) intervened with 4% of complaints referred to them. 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 reflected on lessons learned for the council to improve and actions to deliver these improvements.

As a public body, the Council is required to ensure stakeholders such as citizens, service users, businesses and anyone else with an interest in the Council's activities are able to provide feedback whether this is a comments, compliments or complaints. Included in the report was an action plan to improve the service delivered by the service and to address issues identified in the report. Following the presentation of the report to the Committee, it was requested for an update to be provided in the next six months on the progress made to date.

Further progress will be reported to the Committee in the 22/23 Annual Report.

## Update

The actions reported are updated below, along with next steps which will be reported in the annual report 22/23:

Action	Progress to (February 2023)
<p>Roll out hybrid training to officers using Teams and e-learning to support effective complaint handling.</p> <p>Also contribute with induction training for new starters including reviewing onboarding and offboarding processes for talent and succession planning.</p>	<p>The Feedback Policy: Compliments, Comments and Complaints underpins the foundation for developing training. It has now been reviewed with and work will commence on developing workshops for staff. The revised Feedback Policy: Compliments, Comments and Complaints was signed off by Cabinet in March 2023.</p> <p>The Feedback Policy: Compliments, Comments and Complaints is a key document for navigating and understanding the complaint process and will support officers and new starters across all services. Key stakeholders have been identified and prioritised, our closest working colleagues have worked with us to ensure that they understand and follow process.</p> <p>Extensive progress has been made through collaborative work with colleagues in Business Support Team, Contact Centre, Refuse &amp; Waste and Wastesavers.</p>
<p>Review My Council Services reporting functions and streamline recording including supporting colleagues in the</p>	<p>Good progress made with significant change implemented in November 2022.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reduction of options for closing complaints</li></ul>

<p>Contact Centre to capture effective data.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aligning My Council Services (MCS) closure categories with complaint Feedback Policy: Compliments, Comments and Complaints refusal reasons.</li> <li>• Analysis of historical data highlighted many service requests had been logged as comments – this has now been rectified as per below.</li> <li>• 2 new forms have been developed which allow residents to log service requests directly to waste and recycling.</li> </ul> <p>The complaints form has been revised and we intend to share with the Citizens Panel before launching.</p> <p>The revised form will also capture equalities information, should the resident wish to disclose. This is planned for delivery in Qtr 1 2023/24.</p> <p>The My Council Services system requires updating to reflect the current service area structures – scheduled to be completed during Qtr 1 2023/24.</p>
<p>Collaborate with relevant Council teams to analyse complaint demographics to seek further opportunities for improvement.</p>	<p>We have reviewed a sample and identified some common complaint themes.</p> <p>Following the My Council Services system updates we will work with Newport Intelligence Hub to analyse complaint demographics.</p>
<p>Increase consistency and standardise digital complaints processes in collaboration with Digital Services adopting a multidisciplinary approach.</p>	<p>The Feedback Policy: Compliments, Comments and Complaints review has standardised our approach for complaint handling.</p> <p>Standardised complaint template responses are now in place.</p> <p>The next step will be to consider and align processes and best practice in line with Freedom of Information and Subject Access Requests.</p>
<p>Support and develop service areas to respond to complaints and follow processes in line with our Feedback Policy: Compliments, Comments and Complaints.</p>	<p>The Complaint Resolution team work closely with officers in all service areas to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• quality assure complaint responses</li> <li>• provide support and process guidance</li> <li>• offer suggestions and recommendations to improve service delivery &amp; customer journey</li> </ul> <p>The staff training will contain anonymised case studies reflecting best and poor practice including implications of both.</p>

<p>Review and update the Unacceptable Actions Policy</p>	<p>Improvement to complaint processes and standards, including the revision to the Feedback Policy: Compliments, Comments and Complaints now complete, supporting this policy.</p> <p>Full review of the Unacceptable Actions Policy requires involvement from Customer Services &amp; Health &amp; Safety. Work will commence in Qtr 2 2023/24.</p>
<p>Improving accessibility for disadvantaged and vulnerable customers particularly those who are digitally excluded or have accessibility issues</p>	<p>The Council's draft Digital Strategy has a theme of digital skills and inclusion. An action plan is being developed that will build on previous initiatives around digital inclusion as detailed below.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NCC provide public access to computers via our library service.</li> <li>• If a citizen is being supported by adult social services for example, loan tablets are available to those in need of a device.</li> <li>• NCC provide free public Wi-Fi to members of the public at over 50 public buildings.</li> <li>• Adult community learning team provide courses on digital learning.</li> <li>• Digital services team are working in collaboration with Digital Communities Wales to provide a free digital skills course in the City.</li> </ul>

### Next Steps

Annual report 2022/23 to be presented to Governance & Audit Committee in September 2023 with further update to be provided on actions.

### Financial Summary (Capital and Revenue)

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"> <li>All policies have been reviewed in line with Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Act 2019</li> </ul>	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"> <li>Consulted with the public to find out what is important to them relating to complaints and complaint handling</li> <li>Consulted with Officers to find out what support is needed to help them respond to complaints effectively</li> </ul>	Complaints Resolution Manager  Digital Services Manager

\* Taking account of proposed mitigation measures

### Links to Council Policies and Priorities

Some of the work identified here is included in changes made to the Feedback, Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy agreed by Cabinet in March 2023.

The work to improve complaint processes is aligned to the Council's Corporate Plan 2022/27, especially "an inclusive, fair and sustainable council". This is further supported by the Digital Strategy, adopted March 2023.

### Options Available and considered

1. To consider the contents of this report, providing any additional commentary and/or recommendations
2. To request further information or reject the contents of this report

### Preferred Option and Why

Option 1 is the preferred option with recommendations raised by the Audit Committee to be considered in the Annual Report process.

## **Comments of Chief Financial Officer**

There are no financial impacts coming from this report; it simply seeks to provide an update on the progress of the actions for improvement that were reported to Governance & Audit Committee in September 2022.

In saying that, there always remains a possibility that future complaints, comments and compliments will necessitate changes in approach that would have a financial impact. The pragmatism being that any such changes would initially be considered and afforded from within existing budgets. Where that is not possible, it would require additional funding either through the revenue budget, as part of the MTFP process, or one-off funding following the appropriate approvals.

## **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 a 6-monthly update on the progress of the actions for improvement that were reported to Governance and Audit Committee within the Annual Report in September 2022. 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 actions for improvement in light of the update contained in this report and to make any recommendations for inclusion in the Annual Report process for September 2023.

## **Comments of Head of People, Policy and Transformation**

The Council has a responsibility for ensuring that services are provided to a satisfactory level and that we facilitate improvement where issues have been identified. The Council also actively promotes citizen engagement within its operations so that it can act preventatively and involve citizens in its services. The report provides Governance and Audit Committee with an update on actions for improvement that were included in the Annual Report Comments, Compliments and Complaints 2021/22.

There are no staffing implications relating directly to this report, although the report outlines plans for officer training to support effective complaint handling and induction training for new starters.

## **Background Papers**

Newport City Council Customer Feedback Policy Compliments Comments and Complaints  
[Annual Report Compliments Comments and Complaints Management 2022](#)

Dated: March 2023