

Report

Cabinet

Part 1

Date: 15 November 2023

Subject **Annual Report on Compliments, Comments and Complaints Management 2022-2023**

Purpose To provide Cabinet with an overview of all Corporate and Social Services compliments, comments and complaints received during 2022/2023.

Author Head of People, Policy and Transformation

Ward All

Summary In April 2023 Cabinet agreed the Customer Feedback Policy, Compliments, Comments and Complaints for the Council. This report provides an overview of how the Council manages compliments, comments and complaints and the Council's performance in 2022/23. 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 2022/2023, broken down by service areas and complaint types. The report highlights key trends and themes drawn from the data for consideration.

The report reflects on lessons learned for the council to improve and actions to deliver these improvements. For 2022/23 there has been significant engagement with managers as a result of the newly updated Customer Feedback Policy - Compliments, Comments and Complaints. Employee complaint handling workshops and bespoke service area training sessions have been delivered throughout 2022/23.

Proposal Cabinet is asked to endorse the Annual Report on Compliments, Comments and Complaints Management 2022-2023 and proposed actions.

Action by Complaint Resolution Manager

Timetable Immediate

This report was prepared after consultation with:

- Governance & Audit Committee
- Heads of Service
- Head of Law and Standards – Monitoring Officer
- Head of Finance – Chief Financial Officer
- Head of People, Policy and Transformation
- Strategic Director for Social Services

Signed

Background

This is the third report to Cabinet and provides an overview of how the Council manages Compliments, Comments and Complaints and the annual report on the Council's performance in 2022/23. All annual statistics and corporate actions for improvement are passed onto the Chief Internal Auditor and are then fed into the Annual Governance Statement and Annual Corporate Self-Assessment Report. The Council values customer feedback and uses it as an opportunity to improve the services that we provide.

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*. As such the report has also been received by the Committee and their comments are included.

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 March 2023, the [Council's Cabinet](#) approved the [Newport City Council Customer Feedback Policy, Compliments, Comments and Complaints](#) which is aligned to guidance issued by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. Our Corporate Plan outlines the importance of the views of communities and service users and this policy is one of the ways we support this.

In April 2023, the My Council Services system which records complaints was updated to reflect the Newport City Council restructure. 2023/24 Complaints Annual Report will reflect this essential update.

The Compliments Comments and Complaints Annual Report 2022/23 reflects positively on compliance with the new policy in recording complaints more effectively. The report (attached) outlines the progress made, alongside actions for improvement. These include further development of customer contact and reporting, continued rollout of training and awareness and alignment with policies. We recognise the important feedback that compliments, comments and complaints provide for the Authority and will continue to develop our reporting arrangements.

A summary of the report is provided below and the detailed report is attached as an appendix.

Executive Summary

Background

- The Council has a statutory requirement to process Corporate Complaints in line with the Customer Feedback Policy Compliments, Comments and Complaints and a statutory obligation in line with the All-Wales Statutory Social Services Complaint Handling Process
- This is the third Annual Compliments, Comments and Complaints Report which provides statistics and insights into Complaint Handling arrangements for Newport City Council
- The Council values customer feedback and uses it as an opportunity to improve the services that we provide.
- We use information from complaints to ensure good outcomes, and the more complaints we accurately record, the more able we are to do this.
- The absence of complaints does not necessarily indicate excellent services – just as an increase in complaints does not necessarily indicate poor services.
- Complaints are logged in line with the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) All-Wales Model Complaints policy.

Compliments (Corporate)

- 106 Corporate Compliments were recorded in 2022/2023, compared with 175 received in 2021/22
- A heightened awareness due to the training provided should result in more compliments recorded into 2023/24

Compliments (Social Services)

- 36 compliments were received for Social Services during 2022/23, compared to 33 received in 2021/22.
- Work will commence in Quarter 4 2023/24 to deliver complaint workshops to Social Services teams.

Comments

- 2693 comments were received 2022/23 compared with 4,267 received in 2021/22.
- In July 2022 it was identified many service requests were being recorded incorrectly as a comment. A review resulted in a shorter customer journey and the requests are now sent directly to the service area, and not counted as a comment.
- This benefits service areas by providing a more accurate assessment of service demand, based on amounts of service requests logged.
- We can expect this figure to decrease further in 2023/24, as we have further updated systems so that these are categorised correctly.

Complaints (Corporate)

- 612 corporate complaints were received in 2022/23 – 341 Stage 1, 46 Stage 2 and 225 complaints refused in line with policy.
- Positively, 88% of corporate complaints were resolved at stage 1.
- Corporate stage one complaints: 341 complaints resolved in 2022/23 compared with 271 complaints resolved in 2021/22. 25.8% increase since 2021/22
- Corporate stage two complaints: 46 complaints resolved in 2022/23 compared with 31 complaints resolved in 2021/22. 48.4% increase since 2021/22
- This increase is indicative of complaint recording process refinement and alignment with the PSOW model complaint handling policy.

Complaints (Social Services)

- 73 Social Services Complaints received for 2022/23: 20 Stage 1, 5 Stage 2, 48 complaints were refused in line with Policy.
- 75% of Social Services Complaints were resolved at Stage 1.
- Social Services stage 1 Complaints: 20 complaints resolved in 2022/23 compared with 50 complaints resolved in 2021/22. 60% decrease in complaints resolved since 2021/22
- Social Services stage 2 Complaints: 5 Stage 2 complaints were resolved in 2022/23 compared with 3 Stage 2 complaints resolved in 2021/22. 67% increase in complaints received since 2021/22
- It should be noted that the number of Stage two Social Services complaints received in 2022/23 were still relatively small, with only 5 received.
- We note that Social Services complaints are lower than corporate complaint figures and will be working closely with managers in Social Services on complaints recording.

Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW)

- The PSOW reviewed 37 corporate complaints and 5 Social Services complaints. None were upheld.
- 8 of the 42 complaints required early resolution - this is where the PSOW asks us to take some further action to resolve based on their guidance.

Communications and Awareness Raising

- Complaints Handling training was delivered to 120 officers with ongoing delivery planned.
- Key stakeholders have been identified and prioritised, colleagues have worked with the complaints team to ensure that they understand and follow process.
- Further sessions scheduled for delivery.
- Induction Programme for new starters includes complaint handling processes.
- Process reviews have taken place with colleagues in Business Support, Contact Centre, Refuse & Waste and Wastesavers
- We will be reporting 6 monthly to senior managers for oversight and discussion.

Policy update

- The Feedback Policy: Compliments, Comments and Complaints was reviewed and updated. This was approved by Cabinet in March 2023.
- Standardised complaint template responses are now in place.
- The Unacceptable Actions Policy review has commenced.
- Our [Corporate Plan](#) outlines the importance of the views of communities and service users and this policy is one of the ways we support this.

Reporting Functions and recording

- Aligning My Council Services (MCS) closure categories with the complaint refusal reasons as outlined in the 'Feedback Policy: Compliments, Comments and Complaints'
- Reduction of categories for closing complaints
- New forms have been developed which allow residents to log service requests directly to Waste and Recycling.
- Service area restructure updated for Compliments, Comments and Complaints in April 2023

Equalities

- Optional equalities form introduced in April 2023. Residents can complete this form via MCS. Early analysis of completed forms has identified that contact with the Complaint Resolution Team was made predominantly by White residents aged between 25-34

Actions for Improvement 2023/24

Below outlines the actions that the team will be undertaking in 2023/24 to improve the delivery of the service.

- Further development of My Council Services system to maximise its effectiveness for reporting – the Council's website is also being updated to make the forms easier to find.
- Continue to rollout training for officers.
- Develop councillor complaint handling awareness session.
- Identify under reporting of complaints and implement procedures to capture and record.
- Work with colleagues in residential settings to align their complaint procedures with the revised Customer Feedback Policy.
- Reviewing Independent Investigators contract documentation with colleagues from the All-Wales Complaints Officers Group.
- Unacceptable Actions by Customer Policy review.
- Work with Customer experience review to determine what lessons can be learned.

Financial Summary (Capital and Revenue)

There are no direct financial implications associated with this report.

Risks

Risk Title / Description	Risk Impact score of Risk if it occurs* (H/M/L)	Risk Probability of risk occurring (H/M/L)	Risk Mitigation Action(s) What is the Council doing or what has it done to avoid the risk or reduce its effect?	Risk Owner Officer(s) responsible for dealing with the risk?
Failure to comply with the requirements of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) 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• Policy revised in March 2023• Team received training from PSOW	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

* Taking account of proposed mitigation measures

Links to Council Policies and Priorities

Newport City Council is committed to dealing effectively with any compliments, comments or complaints about its services.

[Customer Feedback Policy Compliments, Comments and Complaints](#)

Our Corporate Plan outlines the importance of the views of communities and service users and this policy is one of the ways we support this.

[Corporate Plan](#)

As outlined below there are also links to the Strategic Equalities annual reports.

Options Available and considered

1. To consider the contents of this report for the Authority, providing any additional commentary 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. This report provides an overview of the comments, compliments and complaints received by the Council during 2022/23 and how they were dealt with and also includes the Ombudsman's annual performance letter.

The Council's Corporate Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy approved by Cabinet in March 2022 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.

In accordance with changes made to the statutory terms of reference of the Governance and Audit Committee under the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021 the Committee were asked to consider this report in September, with a view to making any recommendations to Cabinet, including in relation to the effectiveness of the Council's complaints-handling procedures. Cabinet is now being asked to consider this report and to make any recommendations for their own in relation to improvement of the reporting procedures. 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 standard and to ensure redress, learning and continuous improvement where issues are raised by service users. This report provides an overview of how we have performed in 2022/23 and where we need to improve on how we manage compliments, comments, and complaints. This follows the Cabinet agreeing the Newport City Council Customer Feedback Policy, Compliments, Comments and Complaints in March 2023. This Policy and the Annual Report form part of the Council's work to promote citizen engagement and to work preventatively.

There are no HR implications relating directly to this report although it is noted that staff training and development has taken place to support policy implementation and improve standards.

Scrutiny Committees

Not Applicable, however complaints are also reported through certain service plans to performance Scrutiny Committee.

Fairness and Equality Impact Assessment:

• Wellbeing of Future Generation (Wales) Act

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 consider 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 because 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.

- **Equality Act 2010**

Not applicable as this is an information only report to the Governance and Audit Committee. We work closely with the equalities team as part of the Strategic Equalities Group, and this work is reported in the Strategic Equalities Annual Report.

- **Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011**

The Welsh Language Measure is considered in this report and is also covered by the Compliments, Comments and Complaints Policy.

Consultation

Governance and Audit Committee considered the contents of the report on September 28th 2023, regarding the process and performance of the Council's Compliments, Comments, and Complaints Annual Report 2022/23 and made recommendations for improvement to the annual report and management of complaints.

Background Papers

[PSOW Annual Letter 2022-23](#)

[PSOW Principles of Good Administration and Record Management](#)

[Newport City Council Customer Feedback Policy Compliments Comments and Complaints](#)

[Compliments Comments and Complaints Annual Report 2021/22](#)

Governance and Audit Committee meeting September 2023

Dated: 9 November 2023