

Compliments, Comments and Complaints Annual Report 2023/24

Contents

Executive Summary	1
Background	3
Compliments	5
Compliments (Corporate)	5
Compliments (Social Services).....	6
Compliments by Service.....	7
Comments.....	8
Comments by Service	8
Complaints	9
Complaints (Corporate) – Summary	9
Complaints (Corporate) - Stage 1 and Stage 2 Split by Quarter	10
Complaints (Corporate).....	12
Complaints (Corporate) - Stage 1.....	12
Complaints (Corporate) - Stage 2.....	12
Complaints - Social Services	13
Complaints (Social) – Summary	13
Complaints (Social Services) - Stage 1	13
Complaints (Social Services) - Stage 2 Independent Investigations	13
Complaint Analysis by Ward	14
Complaints to Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW)	15
Unacceptable Actions by Customers	19
Lessons Learned.....	20

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. Complaints are logged in line with the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) All-Wales Model Complaints policy
- 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
- This is the fourth Annual Compliments, Comments and Complaints Report which provides statistics and insights into complaint handling arrangements for Newport City Council

Compliments (Corporate)

- 92 corporate compliments were recorded in 2023/24, compared with 106 received in 2022/23 representing a 13% decrease
- A renewed focus is required across services to promote recording of compliments

Compliments (Social Services)

- 43 compliments were received for Social Services during 2023/24, compared with 36 in 2022/23, representing a 19% increase

Comments

- 290 comments were received in 2023/24 compared with 2,693 in 2022/23 a decrease of 89%
- A review was made in July 2022 which refined and improved the customer journey, and requests are now sent directly to the service area
- This was further improved in 2023/24, removing the option of submitting service requests via the complaints form, ensuring these are categorised correctly
- 124 of the 290 comments are related to Waste and Cleansing, 112 of which were related to the quality of service provided linked to the change in frequency for waste collection. The next highest being 50 comments relating to Highways (including Streetlighting and Parking)

Complaints (Corporate)

- 437 corporate complaints were resolved in 2023/24 – 386 Stage 1, 51 Stage 2. In addition, 338 complaints were refused in line with policy (Refused 256, Duplicate 60, Discontinued 12, Withdrawn 8 and Request for Service 2)
- 88% of corporate complaints were resolved at stage 1
- Corporate stage 1 complaints: 386 complaints resolved in 2023/24 compared with 341 complaints resolved in 2022/23 an increase of 13%
- Corporate stage 2 complaints: 51 complaints resolved in 2023/24 compared with 46 complaints resolved in 2022/23 an increase of 11%
- This increase is indicative of complaint recording process refinement and alignment with the PSOW model complaint handling policy
- We implemented the revised [Newport City Council Customer Feedback Policy, Compliments, Comments and Complaints](#) in 2022/23 and as anticipated complaint figures increased as a result of this and associated awareness raising

Complaints (Social Services)

- 28 Social Services complaints resolved for 2023/24 – 21 stage 1, 7 stage 2. In addition, 47 Complaints were refused in line with policy (Refused 41, Discontinued 5, Withdrawn 1)
- Social Services Stage 1 complaints: 22 complaints were resolved in 2023/24 compared with 20 complaints resolved in 2022/23 an increase of 10 %
- Social Services Stage 2 complaints: 7 complaints were resolved in 2023/24 compared with 5 complaints resolved in 2022/23 an increase of 40% but note the small numbers involved

Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW)

- The PSOW reviewed 52 corporate complaints and closed 51 during the period. Of the 51 cases investigated, 5 cases required early resolution/voluntary settlement to resolve. Accordingly, the PSOW intervention rate for the Council was 10% which is better than the previous year

Communications and Awareness Raising

- Complaints Handling training was delivered to 100 officers with ongoing delivery planned
- Induction Programme for new starters includes complaint handling processes
- Reporting 6 monthly to senior managers through CMT for oversight and discussion

Policy update

- The Unacceptable Actions Policy was reviewed by the Complaints team and a task and finish group of key Council officers. Consideration has been taken to ensure that restrictions placed upon customers' interaction with the Council is proportionate, is regularly reviewed and NCC staff and members are protected in line with HR Policies and Health & Safety. This is ready for final review, engagement, and formal approval due to take place in 2024

Reporting Functions and recording

- Development of My Council Services (MCS) system to maximise its effectiveness for reporting, this supported improvements to the Council's website. This has enabled the development of a Complaints Dashboard within the MI Hub system that provides greater visibility and analysis of the raw data with a view to providing greater insight
- Identified areas which were under reporting complaints via the complaint's awareness/training sessions, implementing procedures to capture and record with teams across NCC
- Worked with colleagues in residential settings to align their complaint procedures with the revised Customer Feedback Policy
- Worked with Customer experience to determine what lessons can be learned, outcome of which means additional recording now takes place within MCS to enable analysis to be provided

Equalities

- Optional equalities form introduced in April 2023 on MCS. Analysis of this data has shown that feedback was made predominantly by White British Female residents aged between 45-54 years of age, closely followed by White British Female residents aged between 55-64 years of age, then White British Male residents aged between 55-64 year of age

Service Development highlights for 2023/24

- The My Council Services (MCS) system went through further development during 2023/24 to maximise its effectiveness for reporting. This enabled the development of a bespoke Complaints Dashboard providing greater visibility and analysis of raw data and improved insight

- Complaint specific training delivered to over 100 Council Officers across multiple sessions – a by-product of this identified under reporting of complaints. Further procedures have been implemented to capture and record this
- Bespoke Councillor complaint handling awareness session held with Governance and Audit Committee delivered by Complaints Standards Authority from The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW)
- The Complaints team delivered sessions with colleagues in residential settings to align their complaint procedures with the revised Customer Feedback Policy. This service is now updating its own processes in line with this
- A review was made of the contract documentation with colleagues from the All-Wales Complaints Officers Group for Independent Investigators. These documents have been reviewed, updated and improvements implemented including procurement processes and legal review
- Working with colleagues in Customer experience; additional recording now takes place within the My Council Services (MCS) System to enable analysis to be provided
- Unacceptable Actions by Customer Policy review, the policy has been reviewed by the Complaints team and a task and finish group of key Council officers. This is now ready for final review, engagement, and formal approval

Actions for Improvement 2024/25

Below outlines the actions that the team will be undertaking in 2024/25 to improve the delivery of the service.

- Introduce improved and more regular reporting processes across key stakeholders within the Council. Inclusion of Complaints data into Mid-Year and End of Year performance reports to Performance Scrutiny Committees. Working with services, developing greater insight of Council performance from complaints data
- Working with the Customer Contact Review to determine what lessons can be learned from the review, and best practice shared to ensure timely responses to Complaints
- Engagement with services across the Council to minimise escalation within complaints process, raising awareness of complaints and its function in NCC and importance of the Ombudsman
- Complaints training provided by PSOW to be given to service areas across NCC to embed positive culture of ownership and resolution of complaints across the Council
- Promote the complaints service through various publications, especially for customers who have not got access or wouldn't normally access our services online
- Develop a renewed focus across our services and contacts to promote the ability to give positive feedback, aligning this to complaint reporting processes
- Finalise Unacceptable Actions by Customers Policy (UAC) review and implement new policy creating awareness of the change in policy. As part of the implementation, we will ensure that all stakeholders are kept informed for UAC cases accordingly

Background

The Council values customer feedback and uses it as an opportunity to improve the services that we provide. The Council has a statutory requirement to process Corporate Complaints in line with the [Customer Feedback Policy: Compliments, Comments and Complaints](#) and also a statutory obligation in line with the [All-Wales Statutory Social Services Complaint Handling Process](#). 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").

This is the fourth Annual Report. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the Compliments, Comments and Complaints for Newport City Council for the year 2023/2024 and how these are managed. Data is separated to provide detail for Corporate and Social Services Compliments, Comments and Complaints. The report contains Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) statistics and details where action is required by the Council to address weaknesses and make improvements.

Complaints data recording is captured through the Council's primary Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system called 'My Council Services' or MCS. Compliments, Comments and Complaints are submitted through various channels; customers can log these via the Newport City Council app, via email or through the Contact Centre. These are acknowledged via My Council Services by the Complaint Resolution Officers and all correspondence is stored securely in the system.

In line with best practice, the Council accepts corporate complaints provided they are submitted within 6 months. It is better to look into concerns while the issues are still recent, which enables a thorough investigation to take place. The Council may, in exceptional circumstances, look at concerns which are brought to its attention later than this. It would, however, ask for evidence as to why these concerns were not brought to the Council's 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. Social Services complaints are accepted within a 12-month period as per the guidance produced by Welsh Government on handling Social Services complaints.

The Complaint Resolution team collaborate with and provide support to all service areas to enable them to compile complaint responses appropriately. This ensures that timescales are adhered to, and the team work proactively with service areas to implement lessons learned.

Service development information outlining progress made in 2023/24 is provided and Actions for Improvement are set out for 2024/25. In 2023/24, The Complaint Resolution Team evaluated and reviewed processes. This resulted in a more consistent approach to complaint recording and handling in both corporate and social services, without compromising the equity of support provided to the service areas.

As a result of the implementation of the revised [Customer Feedback Policy: Compliments, Comments and Complaints](#) in 2023, complaints should be recorded formally and consistently. Complaint figures were expected to increase as a result of this. Where the PSOW identify low complaint rates per population size, they have the power to investigate procedures and can declare Authorities non-compliant.

Compliments

Compliments (Corporate)

A total of 92 Corporate compliments were recorded in 2023/24 a 13% decrease on the 106 recorded in 2022/23.

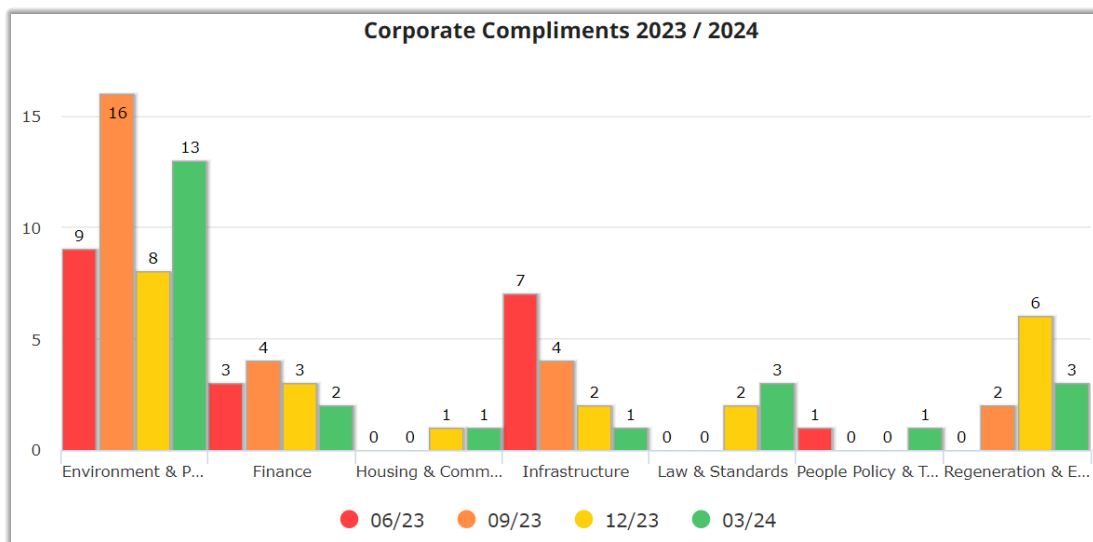
The opportunity to provide positive feedback is accessible to residents using improved webforms, the Council app or directly through customer accounts. A renewed focus needs to be implemented across our services and contacts to promote the ability to give positive feedback and ensure this is recorded appropriately.

Environment and Public Protection received the most compliments (they also received the most comments and complaints as shown later within this report), due to the high number of interactions with these services for residents.

The highest volume within the Environment and Public protection area was for the Waste and Cleansing team – compliments received for

- Cleansing Operatives - *“who are making a huge difference...it is notably cleaner than I have seen for a long time,” “I was so impressed with the thoroughness of the team completing this task that I walked to them to give them my thanks.”*
- Waste Collections/Recycling Centre - *“are always friendly and helpful – fantastic,” “The workers on site were so helpful, a willingness to help and great attitudes. The team are a real credit to you, I’ve never had such help and support”*
- Quick response to missed collections and fly tipping issues – *“Sent email this morning, within the hour they came and collected all the stuff that was fly tipped.”, “Speed of response , reported fly tipping at 8.18am and dumped couch picked by 10.15am”, “I reported 2 issues about the lack of a dumpster and the lack of rubbish pickup, and immediately the next day, the rubbish dumpster was brought to me, and the next day, my rubbish was also picked up. You have a very efficient and operative complaints service.*

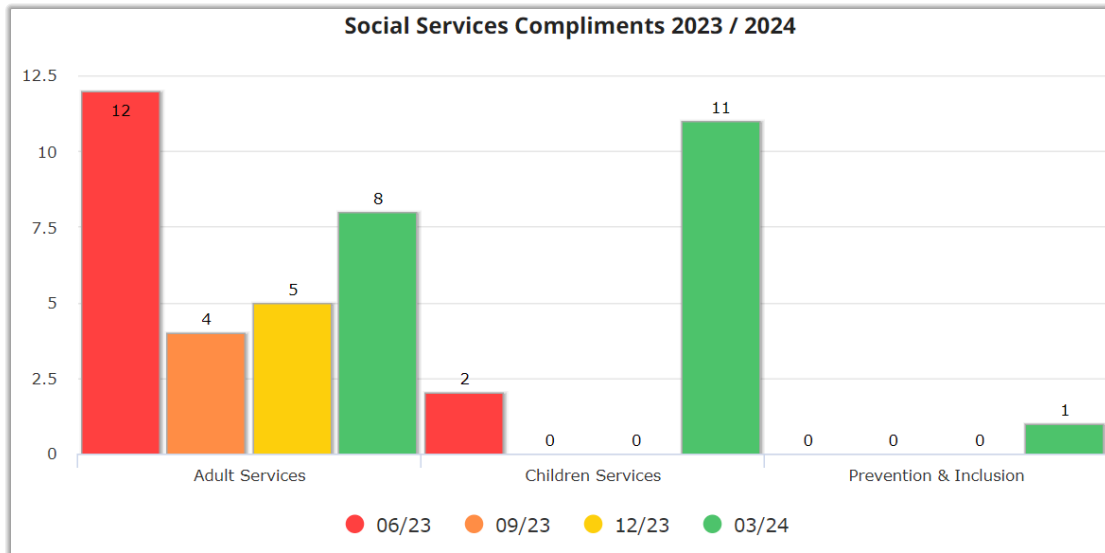
The graph below represents the number of compliments received by service area per quarter.



Compliments (Social Services)

A total of 43 compliments were recorded for Social Services during 2023/24. A 19% increase on the 36 recorded in 2022/23.

This was split by 67% for Adult Services, 30% for Children Services and 3% for Prevention & Inclusion across 2023/24. The graph below shows the breakdown by quarter:



Compliments were highest within the Adult Services department, and praise was given to Housing Adaptations, Reablement and the Adult Social Service teams:

- Housing Adaptations – *“Can you please pass on message from... that they are very pleased with the bathroom adaptations and couldn’t praise everyone involved enough... said the contractors were so courteous and tidy.*
- Reablement – *“He has been very happy with the care and support they have shown, and he has praised the service.” “Huge Credit to you, you have moved this man on extremely well. Your hard work and persistence has given him a huge chance in changing his life.*
- KOMP (this is a one-button computer, made specifically for those who have little to no experience using smartphones, computers, and tablets.) – *“I connected with Dad on the KOMP today. It was so awesome to see him. I think he was quite surprised, and he was happy to be able to see and hear me quite well. Dad and I are both so pleased that you’ve set us up, I’m going to pass the info to my brother and his family so they can use it too. Thanks so much for making this happen. It means the world to us to be able to see him and have a conversation virtually like that. THANK YOU!”*

Compliments by Service

The total of 135 compliments (92 corporate and 43 social services) results in the totals per service area as below which are also split by month.

Council Area	Apr-23	May-23	Jun-23	Jul-23	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23	Dec-23	Jan-24	Feb-24	Mar-24	Total
Infrastructure	0	5	2	0	1	3	1	0	1	0	0	1	14
Education	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Environment & Public Protection	4	1	4	6	5	5	5	2	1	1	5	7	46
Finance	0	0	3	4	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	2	12
Housing & Communities	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
Law & Standards	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	2	5
People, Policy & Transformation	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2
Regeneration & Economic Development	0	0	0	2	0	0	5	0	1	1	0	2	11
Social Services - Adult	4	3	5	3	0	1	2	3	0	3	0	5	29
Social Services - Children & Families	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	1	3	13
Social Services - Prevention & Inclusion	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
	9	10	15	15	6	9	15	6	6	13	9	22	135

Compliments are recorded throughout the year with the highest number in March.

Comments

290 comments were recorded during 2023/24 which is an 89% decrease from the 2,693 comments recorded in 2022/23. There were 4,267 comments recorded in 2021/22. 282 of these were Corporate Comments, 8 were Social Services comments.

As detailed in last year's report, changes were made in July 2022 as a large number of service requests were being recorded as comments. The customer journey was reviewed, and the process refined. A new form was introduced in November 2022 for the Waste and Refuse team. By adapting the process, it enabled the Contact Centre to direct missed collection reports directly to the Waste and Refuse team. This form was adopted by Wastesavers in March 2023. This resulted in a shorter customer journey and has demonstrated a more accurate assessment of service demand.

Further improvements made in 2023/24; removing the option of submitting service requests via the complaints form, ensuring these are categorised correctly. This has radically reduced the comments sent into the complaints department and is truer reflection of comments.

124 of the 290 comments are related to Waste and Cleansing, 112 of which were related to the quality of service provided and the change in timings for waste collection. The next highest were 50 comments relating to Highways (including Streetlighting and Parking).

Comments by Service

The total of 290 comments (282 corporate and 8 social services) results in the totals per service area as below which are also split by month.

Council Area	Apr-23	May-23	Jun-23	Jul-23	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23	Dec-23	Jan-24	Feb-24	Mar-24	Total
Infrastructure	7	3	3	5	5	6	6	3	5	10	6	6	65
Education	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	3	0	0	5
Environment & Public Protection	14	13	6	18	15	6	10	7	8	22	14	19	152
Finance	3	1	2	1	2	4	0	6	5	0	3	5	32
Housing & Communities	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	2	8
Law & Standards	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3
People, Policy & Transformation	0	0	2	0	0	1	3	1	1	0	0	0	8
Regeneration & Economic Development	1	0	1	0	1	1	2	0	1	0	0	2	9
Social Services - Adult	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	5
Social Services - Children & Families	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Social Services - Prevention & Inclusion	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	26	18	17	27	26	19	22	17	22	37	24	35	290

Complaints

Complaints (Corporate) – Summary

As detailed in the breakdown below, there are a total of 437 corporate complaints made up of 386 stage one and 51 stage two.

Year	Stage 1 Complaint	Stage 2 Complaint	Stage 2 Complaint %	Ombudsman Complaint
2018/19	271	28	9.36%	38
2019/20	354	33	8.53%	31
2020/21	261	39	9.50%	14
2021/22	271	31	11.44%	24
2022/23	341	46	11.88%	47
2023/24	386	51	11.67%	22

Complaints (Corporate) - Stage 1 and Stage 2 Split by Quarter

Quarter	Q1		Q2		Q3		Q4		TOTAL
Stage of Complaints	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 1	Stage 2	
Active Travel	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Adult Social Work Teams	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	3
Benefits	3	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	7
Biodiversity	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	3
Cemetery and Crematorium	2	4	8	2	4	0	3	2	25
Children's Social Work Teams	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Commissioning	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Community Regeneration (Libraries, Hubs, Community Centres)	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
Coroners Office	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	3
Customer Services	13	0	7	0	6	0	8	0	34
Democratic Services	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Digital Services and Complaints	1	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	4
Early years, FIS & Play	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
First Contact	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Flooding	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
Fostering and Adoption	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Grounds	3	0	6	0	2	0	2	0	13
Highways (including Streetlighting and Parking)	11	4	9	2	3	2	5	4	40
Housing Needs and Homelessness	3	1	3	2	5	2	8	1	25
HSG/Supporting People					2	0	1	0	3
Inclusion/ALN	2	0			1	0	1	1	5
Income and Tax	0	2	7	0	6	2	11	0	28
Legal					0	1	1	0	2
Managed Care	1	0							1
Parks and Recreation	3	0	2	0			1	0	6
Planning, Building Control and Development	1	3	3	1	3	0	2	1	14
Public Protection	2	1			3	0	3	1	10
Registration Services	1	0							1
Residential and Day Services			1	0					1
Residential and Operations			0	0	0	2			2
Resources and Planning			1	0					1
Safeguarding	0	0			0	0			0
Strategic Housing			1	0	1	0			2
Transport	2	0	1	0					3
Waste and Cleansing	41	2	55	0	48	0	43	4	193
Website	1	0							1

TOTAL	93	19	110	8	88	10	94	14	437
--------------	----	----	-----	---	----	----	----	----	-----

Each complaint provides valuable insights into the experience of those impacted by our services, and by reviewing and analysing the type of complaints, identifying common themes and tracking trends over time we can identify areas for improvement.

Analysis of the top areas for complaints is included below, providing further insight.

Waste and Cleansing – 193 Complaints accounting for 44% of all complaints received for 2023/24. Newport City Council and Newport Wastesavers provide a weekly kerbside-sort collections service for recycling of food waste and dry recycling (cans, cartons and plastic, paper and card, glass, small electrical items, textiles). Nappy and hygiene waste is collected every two weeks, with non-recyclable black bag waste and garden waste collected every 3 weeks (garden waste collections stop for winter from December to February). This is provided for over 160,000 people living in more than 65,000 households It received just 193 total complaints compared with 162 complaints for 2022/23 a rise of 17%. This can be attributed to the change in residual waste collection frequency from every 2 weeks to every 3 weeks.

Highways (including Streetlighting and Parking) – 40 Complaints accounting for 9% of all complaints received for 2023/24. Majority of complaints reporting potholes and condition of roads.

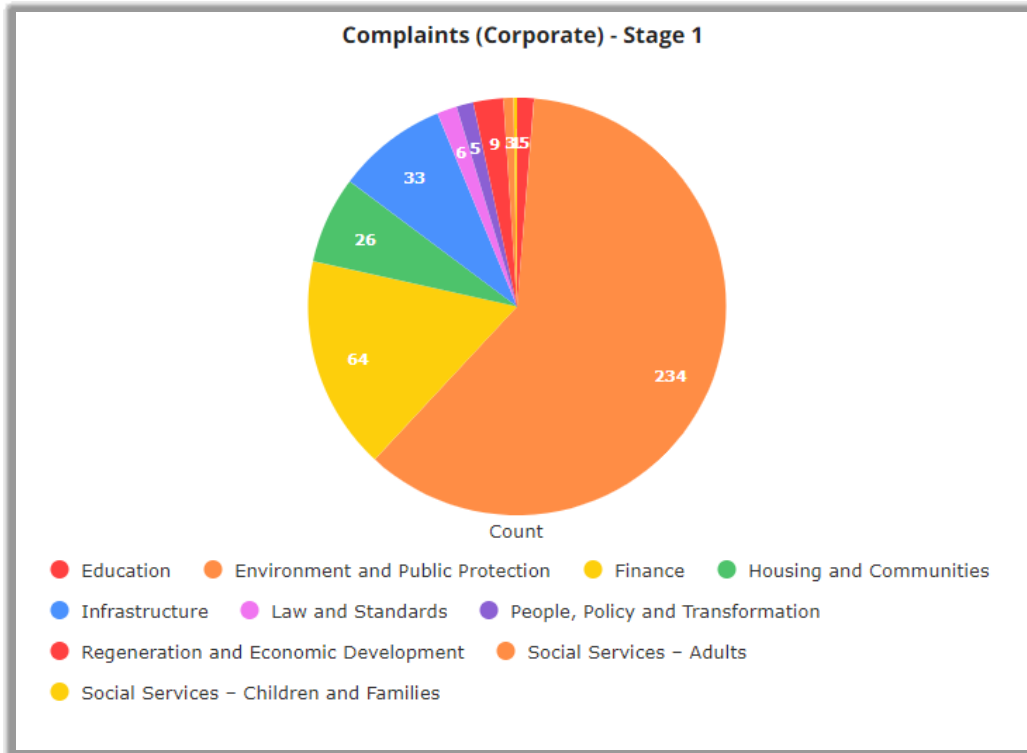
Customer Services – 34 Complaints accounting for 8% of all complaints received for 2023/24. Unhappy with wait times to get through to a Customer Service Advisor, and ability to report missed collections via the Contact Centre, having now to do this online via a form.

Improvements have been made in 2023/2024 to the way in which data is utilised and shared with departments across the Council. The development of a bespoke Complaints dashboard within the MI Hub system has enabled greater visibility and analysis of the complaints data. The team will also work in close collaboration with the Customer Contact Improvement Project using data from complaints.

Complaints (Corporate)

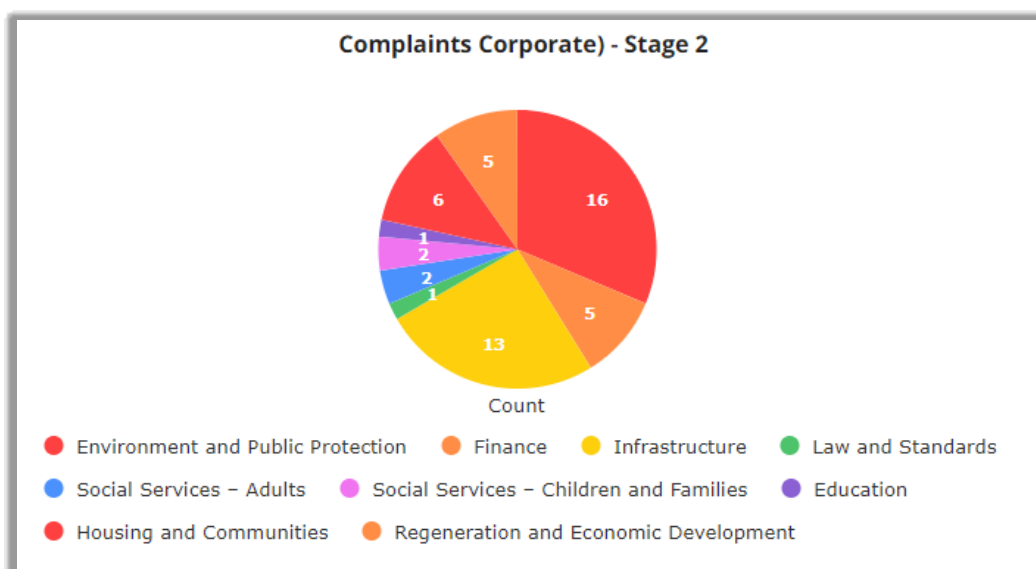
Complaints (Corporate) - Stage 1

- The breakdown below represents a total of 386 stage one complaints resolved by service area for 2023/24, compared with 341 complaints resolved in 2022/23 an increase of 13%. 88% of corporate complaints were successfully resolved at stage 1.



Complaints (Corporate) - Stage 2

- The breakdown below represents a total of 51 stage 2 complaints resolved by service area for 2023/24. Compared with 46 complaints resolved in 2022/23 an increase of 11%



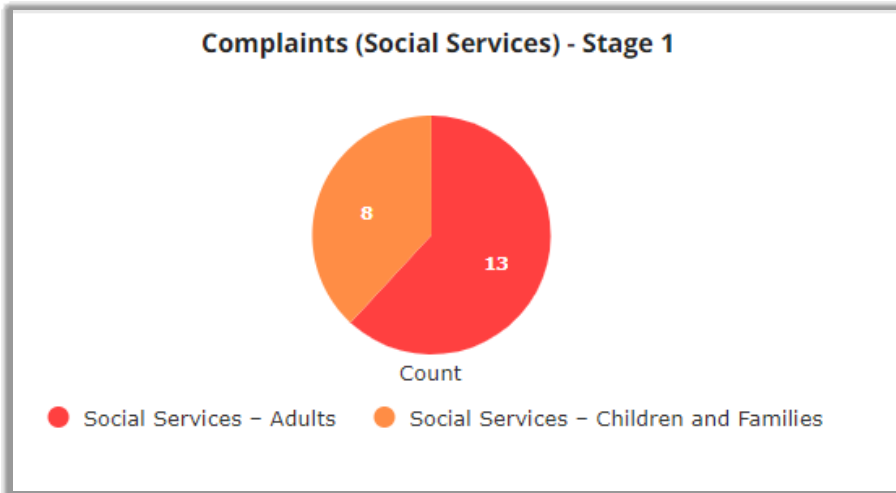
Complaints - Social Services

Complaints (Social) – Summary

Social Service Stage 1	Social Service Stage 2	Social Service Stage Total	Stage 2 Complaint %
21	7	29	24.14%

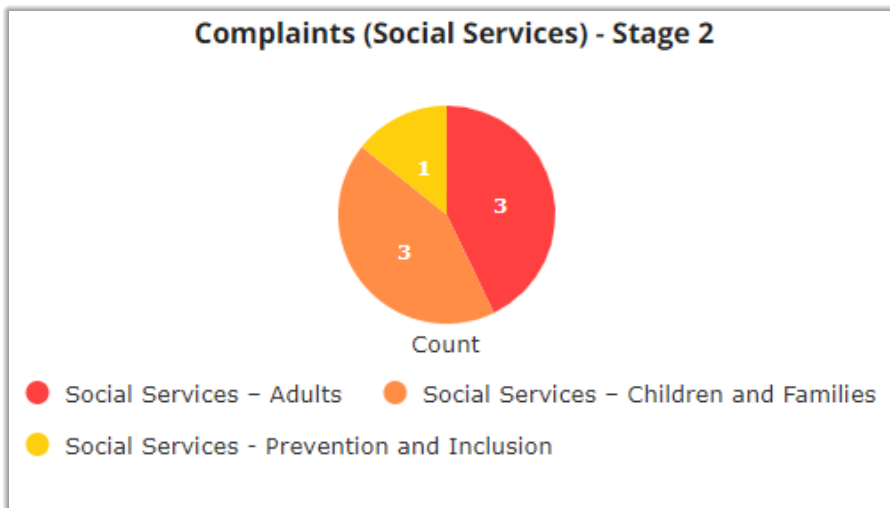
Complaints (Social Services) - Stage 1

The chart below represents a total of 21 stage 1 complaints resolved in 2023/24 compared with 20 in 2022/23, an increase of 10%.



Complaints (Social Services) - Stage 2 Independent Investigations

There was a total of 7 formal stage 2 Social Services complaints resolved in 2023/24, compared with 5 Stage 2 complaints resolved in 2022/23 an increase of 40% but note the small numbers.



The overarching reasons behind complaints for both Stage 1 and Stage 2 were around accuracy of information recorded, conduct of Social Service staff, cost and payments for care, and issues to meet individual's assessed needs. 41 Social Services complaints were refused after assessment, reasons included:

- Disciplinary
- Legal Proceedings underway
- Attention of Another Agency

Complaint Analysis by Ward

As was shown in the annual report for 2022/23 we are now able to analyse complaints by ward. This is at high level only at this stage and we plan to do more analysis in future. Included below are anonymous reports recorded without a location, and those from out of the Newport City Council boundary. At high level, the range of the number of complaints by ward is from 8 to 51. If we factor in population, we have a range of 1.43 to 4.37 complaints per 1,000 residents.

Ward	Number of Complaints	Population	Complaints Per 1,000 Residents
Allt-yr-Yn	24	9,575	2.51
Alway	23	8,445	2.72
Anonymous	51	N/A	N/A
Beechwood	19	7,766	2.45
Bettws	12	8,370	1.43
Bishton and Langstone	13	7,018	1.85
Caerleon	21	7,808	2.69
Gaer	21	9,040	2.32
Graig	15	5,288	2.84
Llanwern	16	3,810	4.20
Lliswerry	28	13,779	2.03
Malpas	20	7,604	2.63
Out of Newport	29	N/A	N/A
Pillgwenlly	19	8,630	2.20
Ringland	16	8,335	1.92
Rogerstone East	13	2,974	4.37
Rogerstone North	8	2,976	2.69
Rogerstone West	19	8,029	2.37
Shaftesbury	21	5,294	3.97
St. Julians	15	9,025	1.66
Stow Hill	24	6,466	3.71
Tredegar Park and Marshfield	21	11,777	1.78
Victoria	17	9,497	1.79
Total	465	161,506	2.88

Complaints to Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW)

During 2023/24, the Ombudsman reviewed 52 complaints made regarding Newport City Council, broken down by subject areas (determined by PSOW) as follows:

Newport City Council	Complaints Received	% Share
Adult Social Services	2	4%
Benefits Administration	1	2%
Children's Social Services	6	12%
Community Facilities, Recreation and Leisure	3	6%
Complaints Handling	10	19%
Covid-19	0	0%
Education	1	2%
Environment and Environmental Health	2	4%
Finance and Taxation	0	0%
Housing	9	17%
Licensing	1	2%
Planning and Building Control	6	12%
Roads and Transport	9	17%
Various Other	2	4%
TOTAL	52	

52 cases were received, and 51 cases closed. Of the cases investigated, 9 were deemed to be out of jurisdiction, 12 were premature, 25 cases were closed after initial consideration by PSOW and 5 cases required early resolution/voluntary settlement to resolve (details in below table).

PSOW prefer to be able to put things right for a complainant at an early stage. If it appears from their initial review of a complaint that something has gone wrong and that there is an obvious solution, the caseworker will often contact the Council and ask it to carry out one or more actions to resolve the matter. If the Council agrees, then the case will be closed without an investigation. PSOW expects the Council to provide evidence on the actions agreed to resolve the complaint.

PSOW made 10 recommendations to Newport City Council during the year across 5 of the cases investigated that required early resolution/voluntary settlement, meaning Newport City Council's intervention rate was 10% for the year 2023/24. This rate is better than the previous year.

In 2023/24, 7 recommendations were due and 43% were complied with in the timescale agreed. The remainder were complied with, but outside the timescales agreed, or remain outstanding as of 9 April 2024. Clarity was sought directly with PSOW to clarify this and whilst NCC had complied and sent the outcomes/resolution to the complainant within the designated timescales it didn't also send evidence to the Ombudsman that this had been done. The Ombudsman has clarified with NCC and other authorities that Newport must complete the action *and* provide evidence to the Ombudsman within the timescale set to comply.

Number of Recommendations made in 2023/24	Number of Recommendations falling due in 2023/24	% of recommendations, complied with on time
10	7	43%

Complaints Received across Wales for each Local Authority

This shows that Newport City Council had 52 complaints referred to the Ombudsman for 2023/24, 0.33% received per 1,000 residents. The range is from 0.15 complaints per 1,000 residents to 0.58 complaints per 1,000 residents. Newport's rate is just below the average across Welsh local authorities. As detailed earlier, the absence of complaints does not necessarily indicate excellent services, just as an increase in complaints does not necessarily indicate poor services

Local Authority	Complaints Received	Received per 1,000 residents
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	15	0.22
Bridgend County Borough Council	59	0.41
Caerphilly County Borough Council	56	0.32
Cardiff Council*	149	0.41
Carmarthenshire County Council	69	0.37
Ceredigion County Council	32	0.45
Conwy County Borough Council	36	0.31
Denbighshire County Council**	31	0.32
Flintshire County Council	51	0.33
Cyngor Gwynedd	38	0.32
Isle of Anglesey County Council	38	0.55
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council	12	0.20
Monmouthshire County Council	29	0.31
Neath Port Talbot Council	35	0.25
Newport City Council	52	0.33
Pembrokeshire County Council	40	0.32
Powys County Council	54	0.41
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council	64	0.27
Swansea Council	81	0.34
Torfaen County Borough Council	14	0.15
Vale of Glamorgan Council	77	0.58
Wrexham County Borough Council	76	0.56
Total	1108	0.36
* inc 2 Rent Smart Wales		
** inc 1 Wales Penalty Processing Partnership		

Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) Annual Letter 2024/24

As discussed above when the PSOW investigates complaints, in some instances it will make some form of “intervention.” Interventions relate to an element of the complaint where the PSOW believes the Council could have provided a better service and may make recommendations such as to write a letter of apology to a customer. Therefore, the aim is to keep the quality of complaint responses high and minimise PSOW interventions. The PSOW intervention rate for 2023/24 for Newport City Council was 10% compared with 17% in 2022/23 which is a positive improvement. Notably, across all statutory bodies in Wales, 1,108 complaints were referred to PSOW regarding local authorities last year – broadly the same number as the previous year. During this period, PSOW intervened in (upheld, settled or resolved at an early stage) 14% of local authority complaints – a similar proportion to recent years.

The table below represents complaint outcomes made by the PSOW for 2023/24.

Newport City Council Complaint Outcomes PSOW	Number	Percentage
Out of Jurisdiction	9	18%
Premature	12	24%
Other Cases closed after initial consideration	25	49%
Early Resolution/Voluntary settlement	5	10%
Discontinued	0	0%
Other Reports - Not Upheld	0	0%
Other Reports - Upheld	0	0%
Public Interest Reports	0	0%
Special Interest Reports	0	0%
Total	51	100%

The table below includes some measures including comparisons with previous years

Year	New Complaints Received by NCC	Received per 1000 Residents	Cases with PSOW Intervention	% of Interventions
2020/21	31	0.20	5	17%
2021/22	40	0.26	4	11%
2022/23	42	0.26	8	17%
2023/24	52	0.33	5	10%

PSOW Code of Conduct Complaints

Code of Conduct complaints regarding City Councillors and Community Councillors are dealt with under a separate ethical standard’s regulatory framework. In accordance with Part III of the Local Government Act 2000, all complaints about breaches of the Member Code of Conduct are referred to the Ombudsman to consider whether any breach has been committed and, if so, whether that breach is serious enough to warrant any sanction. Serious breaches are then investigated and reported to either Standards Committee or the Adjudication Panel for Wales. Standards Committee have the power to suspend a Councillor for up to 6 months and the Adjudication Panel can suspend for up to 1 year or disqualify for up to 5 years.

All Code of Conduct complaints received by the Ombudsman are reported to the Council’s Standards Committee, on an anonymised and confidential basis, and they are also notified of the reasons why the Ombudsman has decided not to accept or investigate the complaints. NCC Standards Committee also receive a copy of the Ombudsman’s Annual letter, and they submit an Annual Report to full Council in November, which includes a summary of these complaints. Each quarter all local authorities in Wales report to the Ombudsman. Further details are included within the PSOW Annual Letter.

In 2023/24, in Wales PSOW received 16% more Code of Conduct complaints than the previous year, relating to both Principal Councils and Town and Community Councils. The office made 21 referrals – to Standards Committees or the Adjudication Panel for Wales, an increase from 12 the previous year.

The table below shows the NCC Code of Conduct Complaints that were sent for 2023/24

Investigations	Number
Decision not to Investigate	4
Discontinued	0
No evidence of breach	1
No action necessary	0
Refer to Adjudication Panel	0
Refer to Standards Committee	0
Total	5

Independent Review

In March 2024, the PSOW became aware of inappropriate comments, of a political nature, made by a member of their staff via social media. These comments were widely reported in the media. The member of staff in question was suspended and subsequently resigned. However, the comments prompted questions about the office’s work on Councillor Code of Conduct cases.

In view of the seriousness of the matter, they commissioned an independent review of their Code of Conduct work and will be publishing the final report on completion of the review and sharing this with the Senedd’s Finance Committee this Autumn.

The PSOW continued their work on supporting improvement in public services last year and worked on a second wider Own Initiative investigation. The investigation included four local authorities and considered carers’ needs assessments the finalised report will be shared this, Autumn. The report will include recommendations to the investigated authorities and will ask all local authorities across Wales to make similar improvements. They have also continued their work on complaints handling standards for public bodies in Wales and now have 56 public bodies following their model complaints handling policy. These public bodies account for around 85% of the complaints they receive. Continuing their work to publish complaints statistics into a third year, with data now published twice a year. This data allows us to see information with greater context – for example, last year 7% of complaints made to Newport City Council’s went on to be referred to PSOW.

PSOW continue to express that authorities and other organisations should not view complaints as negative. 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. PSOW do not provide benchmarking, however they will support Local Authorities with advice and guidance.

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

Unacceptable Actions by Customers

The complaints team dealt with 5 cases through the Unacceptable Actions Policy for 2023/24 reporting year.

Consideration is made when implementing this policy to ensure that it is not used as a means to ignore legitimate request from customers who contact us regularly. The fact that a customer is unhappy with the outcome of a service and seeks to challenge it once, or more than once, should not necessarily cause them to be labelled vexatious or unreasonably persistent. The Unacceptable Actions by Customers policy contributes to our overall aim of dealing 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, vexatious, or unreasonably persistent and what we will do in those circumstances.

The current policy was approved by Cabinet in May 2021 and there have been various changes since then, including organisational structure ones, which meant the existing policy needed a review, this was included in the action plan for the Compliments, Comments and Complaints report for 22/23.

An initial review of the policy was conducted in consultation with various stakeholders. A task and finish group were set up to assist in the review of the policy. This group had representation from Complaints, Health and Safety, HR, Customer Services and Democratic Services.

The Unacceptable Actions by Customers Policy (UAC) review has concluded, and the new policy is now being finalised for implementation. This will include awareness sessions for NCC staff, so they are familiar with the new policy and how to use this.

Service Development

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

Progress made in 2023/2024:-

- The My Council Services (MCS) system went through further development during 2023/24 to maximise its effectiveness for reporting. This enabled the development of a bespoke Complaints Dashboard providing greater visibility and analysis of raw data and improved insight
- Complaint specific training delivered to over 100 Council Officers across multiple sessions – a by-product of this identified under reporting of complaints. Further procedures have been implemented to capture and record this
- Bespoke Councillor complaint handling awareness session held with Governance and Audit Committee delivered by Complaints Standards Authority from The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW)
- The Complaints team delivered sessions with colleagues in residential settings to align their complaint procedures with the revised Customer Feedback Policy. This service is now updating its own processes in line with this
- A review was made of the contract documentation with colleagues from the All-Wales Complaints Officers Group for Independent Investigators. These documents have been reviewed, updated and improvements implemented including procurement processes and legal review
- Working with colleagues in Customer experience; additional recording now takes place within the My Council Services (MCS) System to enable analysis to be provided
- Unacceptable Actions by Customer Policy review, the policy has been reviewed by the Complaints team and a task and finish group of key Council officers. This is now ready for final review, engagement, and formal approval

During 2024/25, we will continue to work with service areas and refine our processes with My Newport Team and support colleagues in relevant service areas. The Council has also conducted a Customer Contact Review, examined the customer experience, and understood the Council's strengths and weaknesses towards enabling people to complete transactions online, in person and also signposting to the other organisations to access the services they need. The complaints team will be working closely with the project team to implement improvements across NCC. This review has recently been reported to Scrutiny Committee.

Lessons Learned

- Working closely with service areas identifying reoccurring issues, themes and making changes to improve
- Reducing callback requests by encouraging service areas to update customer notes on My Council Service (MCS) system
- More service area engagement to increase level of understanding in terms of the Ombudsman's powers and what they are looking to achieve
- Continued engagement with PSOW and areas within NCC with high level of complaints, increasing level of understanding of the Ombudsman. This is a significant piece of work that will be rolling year on year.

Actions for Improvement 2024/25

Below outlines the actions that the team will be undertaking in 2024/25 to improve the delivery of the service.

- Introduce improved and more regular reporting processes across key stakeholders within the Council. Inclusion of Complaints data into Mid-Year and End of Year performance reports to Performance Scrutiny Committees. Working with services, developing greater insight of Council performance from complaints data
- Working with the Customer Contact Review to determine what lessons can be learned from the review, and best practice shared to ensure timely responses to Complaints
- Engagement with services across the Council to minimise escalation within complaints process, raising awareness of complaints and its function in NCC and importance of the Ombudsman
- Complaints training provided by PSOW to be given to service areas across NCC to embed positive culture of ownership and resolution of complaints across the Council
- Promote the complaints service through various publications, especially for customers who have not got access or wouldn't normally access our services online
- Develop a renewed focus across our services and contacts to promote the ability to give positive feedback, aligning this to complaint reporting processes
- Finalise Unacceptable Actions by Customers Policy (UAC) review and implement new policy creating awareness of the change in policy. As part of the implementation, we will ensure that all stakeholders are kept informed for UAC cases accordingly