



Cyngor Castell-nedd Port Talbot
Neath Port Talbot Council

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
COMMUNITY, FINANCE AND STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF STRATEGY AND
CORPORATE SERVICES

N. DANIEL

9th January 2025

Matter for Monitoring

Wards Affected: All Wards

Compliments and Complaints Annual Report 2023/2024

Purpose of the Report:

1. To provide an overview of the number of compliments and complaints received during the period 1st April 2023 to 31st March 2024.

Background:

2. Complaints and compliments continue to provide us with valuable information about how we perform as a council and provide us with an insight into what customers think about our services. In many cases people who complain tell us what we have done wrong and how we can do better. We use this feedback to improve our services or processes.

3. Publishing an annual report demonstrates the council's commitment to transparency and a positive approach to acknowledging, investigating, responding to and learning from complaints.
4. The council revised its Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy in March 2021, which was deemed compliant with the Ombudsman Wales (previously Public Services Ombudsman for Wales) principles and model complaints handling procedure. During this time the reporting of complaints changed in line with the Ombudsman's reporting requirements counting the % of complaints are closed (upheld/not upheld).
5. Figures and further detail for both compliments and complaints on a directorate basis have been reported to the respective Cabinet / Cabinet Boards during 2023/2024. Going forward these reports will be taken to the relevant scrutiny committees.

Summary of Performance 2023/2024

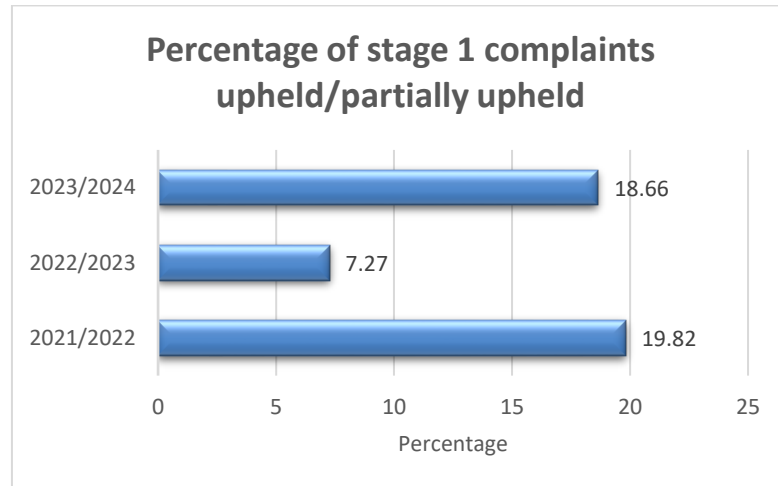
The following provides an overview of the year's performance:

Stage 1 Complaints

6. Complaints that fall into the Stage 1 category are requests for a service that have not been actioned or properly dealt with. These complaints are handled by the staff and/or managers directly responsible for delivering the service, with a response to be provided within 10 working days.
7. There was an increase of 44 in the number of Stage 1 complaints received across the council from 165 received in 2022/2023 to 209 received in 2023/2024.

8. However, the percentage is still relatively low for those complaints which are upheld/partially upheld. During 2023/2024 the total number upheld/partially upheld was 18.66% (39 of 209).

This is an increase on the previous year of 11.39%. In 2022/2023 the percentage was 7.27% (12 of 165) and in 2021/2022 the percentage was 19.82% (22 of 111).



9. The table below sets out a breakdown of the numbers of Stage 1 complaints received and upheld / partially upheld per directorate.

Whilst there has been an increase in the number of complaints reported this reflects work being undertaken across the directorates to ensure all complaints are being recorded. This has been communicated to Ombudsman Wales and they are fully supportive of the revisions. Neath Port Talbot Council are currently the third lowest reporting authority across Wales for 2023/2024, and the lowest report authority in relation to councils with similar population numbers.

It is expected that the figures will fluctuate whilst processes are reviewed, this work will also be supported through an Internal Audit review as part of the 2024/2025 Internal Audit Plan.

Directorate	2023/2024		2022/2023	
	Stage 1	Stage 1 Upheld / Partially Upheld	Stage 1	Stage 1 Upheld / Partially Upheld
Strategy & Corporate Services	30	9	23	5
Education, Leisure & Lifelong Learning	13	1	11	0
Environment & Regeneration	96	21	63	0
Social Services, Health & Housing	70	8 (1 of which was partially upheld)	68	7
Total	209	39	165	12

10. No systemic failings could be attributed to a particular service area from the instances reported and investigated. Where the complaint was upheld/partially upheld any lessons learned from the investigation are applied by the relevant service areas to improve service delivery and customer satisfaction going forward.
11. Considering the breadth of dealings across the council, it should be noted that the number of investigated complaints upheld/partially upheld was relatively low with the majority being resolved or not upheld.

Stage 2 Complaints

12. When a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of a Stage 1 complaint the complaint falls within this category. The complaint is formally investigated by the designated complaints officer within the relevant directorate and a response provided within 20 working days. This includes a review of all relevant correspondence and often incorporates discussions with both the complainant and relevant officers from the service department concerned to enable a fuller response to be provided.
13. There was an increase in the number of Stage 2 complaints received from 22 in 2022/2023 to 39 in 2023/2024. 38.5% (15 of

39) Stage 2 complaints were upheld /partially upheld in 2023/2024, an increase on the figure of 3 upheld/partially upheld in 2022/2023.

14. The table below sets out a breakdown of the numbers of Stage 2 complaints received and upheld / partially upheld per Directorate.

Directorate	2023/2024		2022/2023	
	Stage 2	Stage 2 Upheld / Partially Upheld	Stage 2	Stage 2 Upheld / Partially Upheld
Strategy & Corporate Services	3	0	4 (<i>plus 1 carried forward from 2021/2022</i>)	0
Education, Leisure & Lifelong Learning	2	0	4	1
Environment & Regeneration	4	0	10	0
Social Services, Health & Housing	6	2 partially upheld	3	2
Total	15	2	22	3

15. At the conclusion of Stage 2, the complainant is made aware of the ability to refer their complaint to another organisation for external consideration e.g. Ombudsman Wales. Before agreeing to investigate further, the Ombudsman should normally be satisfied that the matter has already been raised with the council and that the council has had a reasonable opportunity to investigate and respond in accordance with the two stage policy. Where this has not been done, the Ombudsman will usually refer the complaint back to the council to provide an opportunity to attempt to resolve the complainant's concerns through the council's own complaints processes first.

Compliments

16. There has been an increase in the number of compliments received across the council. In 2023/2024, 303 compliments were received, compared to 326 in 2022/2023. It is acknowledged that more work needs to be done to ensure compliments are being fed into quarterly reporting across all directorates.
17. The table below sets out a breakdown of the numbers of compliments received per directorate.

Directorate	Compliments
Chief Executives	96
Education, Leisure & Lifelong Learning	22
Environment & Regeneration	71
Social Services, Health & Housing	114

Reporting Processes

18. Designated complaints officers within each directorate provide advice to their colleagues to ensure appropriate and timely complaint responses. The designated officers collate and submit quarterly information provided to them from service areas.
19. Quarterly compliments and complaints performance reports have previously been reported to Cabinet and Cabinet Boards. Going forward compliments and complaints will be reported to Cabinet and Scrutiny Committees relating to services within their purview.
20. Since April 2019, the council's quarterly complaints data has been forwarded to Ombudsman Wales to enable an all Wales comparison and the data for all council's is published on their website for information. A complete set of data for 2023/2024 will be published by Ombudsman Wales in December 2024.

Welsh Language Complaints

21. In line with the Welsh Language Standards the complaint process for Welsh language matters operates differently to the way other complaints are handled – the legislative provision stemming from the 2011 Welsh Language Measure. This includes the need to keep a record in relation to each financial year of the number of complaints received relating to our compliance with the standards.
22. During 2023/2024 there were no complaints made to the Welsh Language Commissioner.

Unreasonable/Unacceptable Customer Behaviour

23. When the actions and behaviour of a few customers are considered unacceptable, these are addressed by the relevant Head of Service. Reviews of unacceptable behaviour result in a contact protocol being implemented in accordance with the Unreasonable/Unacceptable Customer Behaviour Policy, which was approved by Cabinet on 29th May 2019. At the end of 2023/2024 3 protocols were in place.

Governance & Audit Committee

24. The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 gives the Governance & Audit Committee a defined assurance role around complaints. The Committee will review this Annual Compliments and Complaints report following consideration Cabinet.

Financial Impact

25. There are no financial impacts associated with this report.

Integrated Impact Assessment

26. There is no requirement to undertake an Integrated Impact Assessment as this report is for monitoring purposes.

Valleys Communities Impact

27. No implications.

Workforce Impacts

28. Staff have been subjected to violent, aggressive and unacceptable behaviour on occasion. Line managers undertake risk assessments to help prevent such occurrences and to lower the impact of poor behaviour. Cross departmental information sharing helps to improve communications and preparedness to help frontline staff to anticipate difficult customer queries at the first point of contact.

Legal Impacts

29. This annual report has been produced in line with the council's two stage policy which is reflected in the body of this report.

Risk Management

30. The profile of complaints made during the year, their resolution and lessons learned is taken into account when both the council's Annual Governance Statement and Self-Assessment are prepared. No systemic failings were identified by service areas or the designated complaints officers for complaints that were recorded, investigated and concluded in 2023/2024.

Consultation

31. There is no requirement for external consultation on this item.

Recommendations

32. For Members to monitor the performance contained within this report.

List of background papers

33. None

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