

## **POLICY AND RESOURCES CABINET BOARD**

### **REPORT OF THE HEAD OF CORPORATE STRATEGY AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES – MRS. KAREN JONES**

**9<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2015**

#### **SECTION C – MATTER FOR MONITORING**

**WARDS AFFECTED: ALL**

#### **COMPLAINTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMMENTS - ANNUAL REPORT**

##### **Purpose of Report**

To provide Members of the Cabinet Board with details of the annual report regarding complaints, compliments and comments.

##### **Background**

This report provides an overview of the complaints, compliments and comments during the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015 in accordance with the Councils two stage policy.

In July 2011, the Welsh Government issued a model policy for adoption by public service providers in Wales with a view to creating a standardised, streamlined and seamless process for complaints from members of the public. The Welsh Government also issued accompanying guidance on implementing the model policy which was then adopted by NPTCBC in August 2011.

The guiding principle underlying the policy is “investigate once, investigate well” with an emphasis on conducting one investigation to deal thoroughly with the concerns raised, rather than multiple investigations at differing levels of the Council.

There are two stages to the policy and complainants who are dissatisfied with the Council's response after those stages have been completed may refer their complaint to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales or other appropriate organisation for independent external consideration.

### **Two stage policy overview**

**Stage 1 - informal resolution** - complaint is handled by the staff directly responsible for delivering the service with a response provided within 10 working days.

**Stage Two- formal investigation**- complaint is formally investigated by the designated complaints officer within the relevant directorate and a response provided within 20 working days.

**Independent external consideration** – the complainant is made aware of the ability to refer to another organisation for external consideration e.g. the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. The Ombudsman should normally be satisfied that the matter has already been raised with the Council and that it has had a reasonable opportunity to investigate and respond in accordance with the two stage policy.

### **Reporting Processes**

The Council has a Corporate Complaints Group, the members of which are responsible for implementing the policy and co-ordinating responses to complaints for the relevant directorate in which they work. This group is chaired by the Customer Services Manager and meets regularly to promote a corporate approach to handling and recording complaints and share good practice. Collated information is now stored electronically in a shared folder as a holistic record of dealings by the designated officers. As requested by Members, complaint summary reports relating to each directorate will be a regular item on scrutiny committee agendas going forward.

The Customer Services Manager also attends the All-Wales Complaints Group meetings held twice a year to share experience and learn from other councils.

The Head of Legal Services also reports annually to the Policy and Resources Cabinet Board on complaints referred to the Ombudsman following receipt of the Ombudsman's Annual Report to enable comparisons between this authority and other Welsh Councils.

Furthermore, in accordance with the set Welsh Language Commission deadlines, the Head of Corporate Strategy and Democratic Services reports annually on complaints regarding the Council's Welsh Language provision to Policy and Resources Cabinet Board.

### **Summary/Overview 2014/2015**

#### **Social Services, Health and Housing**

The Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulation 2014 and the Representation Procedures (Wales) Regulation 2014 came into effect on the 1st August 2014. A key implication flowing from the implementation of the regulations on complaints is the need for the authority to strengthen the way in which it manages the process of investigating and responding to complainants within required timescales and learning and applying any lessons identified.

Consultation findings concluded that arrangements should be differentiated to clearly separate the administrative and investigative functions at Stage 1 of the complaints process.

Following an internal restructure the Directorate Support Office is now responsible for administering and supporting the complaints system by applying the procedures within the regulations.

The individual service areas are responsible for ownership of the process and investigation of complaints at Stage 1, bringing them to resolution or outcome and learning and applying the practice, procedural and policy implications.

The vast majority of the resolved complaints during this period were alleged communication difficulties and quality of social work support. Complaints resolved under The Children Act 1989, once again, reduced compared to the previous year. Thirty-eight complaints were considered and resolved under the

Community Care Act and nine were resolved for Business Strategy, Environmental Health, Trading Standards and Housing related services.

Three complaints were resolved at Stage 2 of the procedure in 2014/15 compared with ten in the previous financial year. The dedicated Complaints Team found that mediation has been a useful tool in promoting a resolution to some complaints without recourse to a formal investigation.

Three complaints were resolved at Stage 3 (Independent Panel) which is the same as the previous financial year. Apart from a requirement to apologise in a variety of circumstances, the resulting action plans highlight several recommendations which the services use to improve future service delivery. It should be noted that from 1<sup>st</sup> August 2014, Stage 3 of the Social Services procedures has been removed; complainants who remain dissatisfied with the response at Stage 2 can contact the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

## **Environment**

Since the task and finish group outcomes, improved recording of information and action taken has taken place. Complaints at stage 1 have increased from 7 to 12 and at stage 2 decreased from 16 to 14 compared to last year with compliments decreasing from 30 to 21.

A total of 8 Stage 1 complaints were upheld, the majority of which were regarding Waste Collection Services. These complaints were rectified and apologies made. Three Stage 2 complaints were also upheld, two of which were regarding Waste Collection Services and one a Building Control complaint which resulted in a change of policy.

## **Education and Lifelong Learning**

There were 15 Stage 1 complaints of which 14 were not upheld following further investigation. The remaining complaint was partly upheld which resulted in the process relating to time taken to issue a statement of special needs being changed.

Twenty stage 2 complaints arose of which 17 were not upheld. Two were partly upheld due to external factors outside the council control. The remaining one related to a statement of special educational needs which then

resulted in a change in the procedure to improve the issuing of future statements.

Two compliments were received.

### **Finance and Corporate Services**

Compliments relating to the Council website are now routinely recorded, increasing overall compliments received for the Chief Executive's teams to 213 for Corporate Strategy, Customer Services, Committee Section, Elections, Mayoral and Scrutiny sections.

Twenty three stage 1 complaints were received covering a range of services including council tax and benefits disputes, registrars, bus pass and blue badge administrative processes. Six were upheld and dealt with in accordance with Council policy with processes reviewed and updated as needed.

Four complaints were recorded at Stage 2 and although not upheld, procedures were reviewed and updated where relevant.

One case had been subject to a Public Ombudsman enquiry but this was not upheld.

### **Summary**

The number of complaints made under the Council's Complaints Policy has increased compared to the same period last year. It is likely that part of the increase is due to consistent expectations and improvements in capturing and recording complaints. It should be noted that the number of complaints upheld remained relatively low with the vast majority being resolved or not upheld.

Complaints will continue to be monitored to help identify the cause of any continuing or recurring service area issues. Complaints and Compliments activity is now incorporated in to the Council's wider performance management arrangements to better support Members in overseeing performance on a holistic basis. Managers also encourage the recording of compliments to help others learn from what our customers tell us we do well. This is particularly important as we work to deliver challenging savings targets and there are fewer staff to meet those targets.

The level of activity demonstrates that customers are using the complaints process appropriately. The low level of complaints escalating to stage 2 evidences that in the main, complaints are addressed by responsible service area managers at an early stage and, where applicable, lessons learned following investigation are being implemented.

### **Appendices**

**None**

### **List of Background Papers**

**None**

### **Officer Contact**

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