

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

10 December 2020

Report of the Assistant Chief Executive and Chief Digital Officer– K. Jones

Matter for Monitoring

Wards Affected: All Wards

Comments, Compliments and Complaints Annual Report 2019/2020

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide an overview of the complaints, compliments and comments received during the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020.

Executive Summary

2. Neath Port Talbot Council is a large organisation providing a variety of services and whilst every effort is made to carry out responsibilities properly and effectively, complaints can be made for various reasons.
3. Complaints provide valuable information about how we are performing and what our customers think about our services. Most people who complain tell us what we have done wrong and how we can do better. We use this feedback to improve our services, strengthen our relationships with customers and make better use of our resources. 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 recognises that in order to meet the needs and concerns of the public, the monitoring of customer feedback is a valuable tool. We will continue to review complaints, compliments

and comments feedback and make changes to ensure that our complaints process remains customer focused to help the Council provide the best service possible.

5. The two stage complaints model recommended by Welsh Government operates in Neath Port Talbot Council and is set out in the Council's Corporate, Compliments and Complaints Policy which was approved by the Cabinet on 30th September 2020. This approach is practised by all Welsh Authorities.
6. 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.
7. As well as the two stages in the policy, complainants who are dissatisfied with the Council's response following completion of those stages can refer their complaint to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) or another appropriate organisation for independent external consideration.
8. Corporate performance measures regarding complaints and compliments are an important part of the Council's Performance Management accountability and scrutiny processes.

Summary of performance 2019/2020

9. **Stage 1 Complaints** - Despite a small increase in the number of recorded Stage 1 complaints from 136 in 2018/19 to 148 in 2019/20 and bearing in mind the extent of whole authority responsibilities, no systemic failings could be attributed to a particular service area from the instances reported and investigated.
10. The overall number of upheld/partially upheld complaints increased by one from 46 to 47. Where the complaint was upheld/partially upheld the lessons learned from the investigation should be applied by the relevant service areas to improve service delivery and customer satisfaction going forward. 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. A summary per directorate is provided in Appendix 1.

11. **Stage 2 Complaints** - Overall, the number of stage 2 complaints broadly remained the same as the previous year (reduced by 1 from 26 to 25), however there was an overall increase in the number upheld/partially upheld complaints which increased from 5 in 2018/19 to 11 in 2019/20.
12. Whilst there has been an increase, the numbers are still relatively small and no systemic failings could be attributed to a particular service area from the instances reported. Where the complaint was upheld/partially upheld, lessons learned from the investigation should be applied by the relevant service areas to improve service delivery and customer satisfaction going forward and to reduce recurrence of the same issue. A summary per directorate is provided in Appendix 1.
13. **Compliments** - Overall, the number of compliments has increased compared to the previous financial year from 285 in 2018/19 to 344 in 2019/20. The increase is largely due to 64 compliments being received by the Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning Directorate's Wellbeing and Cynnydd Team, with Corporate Services seeing a small increase and Social Services Health and Housing and Environment Directorates seeing small reductions. The complaints officers continue to reiterate the need for services to ensure compliments and positive feedback are captured and acknowledged. More detail per directorate is provided in Appendix 1.

Background

Two stage policy overview:

14. **Stage One** - complaints that fall into this category are requests for a service that have not been actioned or properly dealt with. These complaints are handled by the staff and/or manager directly responsible for delivering the service with a response to be provided within 10 working days.

15. **Stage Two** - if a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of a stage 1 complaint, the complaint is then 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.
16. **Independent external consideration** – 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. the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW). 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.

Reporting Processes

17. Designated complaints officers in each service directorate provide advice to their colleagues to ensure appropriate and timely complaint responses for the relevant directorate in which they arise. The designated officers collate and submit quarterly information provided to them from service areas into the corporate performance management system (CPMS).
18. Quarterly compliments and complaints performance reports are produced from CPMS and reported to Cabinet and Cabinet Boards relating to services within their purview. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic quarter 3 - 2019/20 information was not reported to Cabinet, Education, Skills and Culture Cabinet Board and Regeneration & Sustainable Development Cabinet Board and quarter 4 - 2019/20 was not reported to Cabinet and the four Cabinet Boards.

Public Services Ombudsman Wales (PSOW)

19. At Cabinet on 30th September 2020, the Head of Legal Services presented information contained in the PSOW Annual Report 2019/2020. For Neath Port Talbot Council, 22 complaints were received in 2019/2020 which was a decrease from 38 in 2018/2019.
20. Since April 2019, the Council's quarterly complaints data has been forwarded to the PSOW to enable an all Wales comparison.

Welsh Language Complaints

21. The Council's Welsh Language Scheme was superseded by the imposition of the Welsh Language Standards in March 2016. 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. During 2019/2020 there was an increase in the number of Welsh language complaints received; 8 complaints compared to 5 in 2018/2019. Of the complaints received 7 were via the Welsh Language Commissioner and 1 direct to the Council. Details of these complaints were included in the Welsh Language Standards Annual Report to Cabinet on 30th July 2020.

Unreasonable/Unacceptable Customer Behaviour

22. 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 approved by Cabinet on 29th May 2019. Two protocols were in place during 2019/2020.

Financial Impact

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

Integrated Impact Assessment

24. An equalities monitoring form should be sent to the complainant when the outcome of a complaint is provided. The profile of complainants over the last year did not raise any known equality issues. However, to help provide a better insight in future, the complaints officers will seek additional information from the complainant when acknowledging complaints to help ensure no particular group is affected. The recent review of the Corporate Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy incorporated the need to include consideration of reasonable adjustments if/when appropriate with the involvement of the Corporate Policy Officer for Equalities and Welsh Language

Valleys Communities Impact

25. No implications.

Workforce Impacts

26. 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

27. 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

28. The profile of complaints made during the year, their resolution and lessons learned is taken into account when the Council's Annual Governance Statement is prepared. No systemic failings were identified by service areas or the designated complaints officers for complaints that were recorded, investigated and concluded in 2019/2020.

Consultation

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

Recommendations

30. For Members to monitor performance contained within this report.

Reason for Proposed decision

31. Matter for monitoring – no decision required.

Implementation of decision

32. Matter for monitoring – no decision required.

List of background papers

33. None

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