

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

15th December 2021

Report of the Head of Human & Organisational Development S. Rees

Matter for Monitoring

Wards Affected: All Wards

Comments, Compliments and Complaints Annual Report 2020/2021

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide an overview of the comments, compliments and complaints received during the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.

Executive Summary

2. This Annual Report for 2020/2021 reports data for a year which the council started in emergency mode to deal with the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic. Some council services were closed down to assist in reducing the spread of the disease. Some services were changed so that critical services could operate safely and new services were established to discharge duties placed on the council by Welsh Government.
3. Complaints and compliments 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. 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. In March 2021, Cabinet approved a revised Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy for Neath Port Talbot Council, based on a model complaints handling procedure for public service providers in Wales (issued by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW)). A copy of the

revised Policy was shared with the PSOW who confirmed the Policy was deemed compliant with the PSOW's principles and model handling complaints policy.

5. In summary, during 2020/2021 there was a significant reduction in both the number of Stage 1 complaints received and the number upheld/partially upheld compared to 2019/2020. There was also a reduction in the number of Stage 2 complaints received and a significant reduction in the number upheld/partially upheld. With regard to compliments, there was a continuation of the steady year on year increase in the number received over the last three years.

Summary of performance 2020/2021

Stage 1 Complaints

6. There was a significant reduction in both the number of Stage 1 complaints received across the Council and the number upheld/partially upheld during 2020/2021. 24 upheld/partially upheld of 99 Stage 1 complaints received during 2020/21 compared to 47 upheld/partially upheld of 148 Stage 1 complaints received during 2019/2020. A summary per directorate is provided in Appendix 1.
7. 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.
8. No systemic failings could be attributed to a particular service area from the instances reported and investigated.
9. Where the complaint was upheld/partially upheld the lessons learned from the investigation are 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.

Stage 2 Complaints

10. There were also fewer Stage 2 complaints received across the Council during 2020/21. 14 were received in 2020/2021 compared to 25 in 2019/2020. There was a significant reduction in the number of stage 2 complaints upheld / partially upheld with just one in 2020/2021 compared to 11 in 2019/2020. A summary per directorate is provided in Appendix 1.
11. Complaints that fall within this category is when 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.
12. 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.

Compliments

13. There has been a steady year on year increase in compliments over the last 3 years from 115 in 2017/18 to 360 in 2020/2021. Whilst most directorates have seen a steady increase in compliments received during 2020/2021 as detailed in the breakdown in Appendix 1, the Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning Directorate has seen a significant reduction on the previous year. In the main this was due to the impacts of COVID-19 where there was reduced contact with young people, a limited number of events could be run (e.g. theatres were closed) and most leisure facilities were closed.

Reporting Processes

14. 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).

15. 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, during 2020/2021, quarterly compliments and complaints performance reports were not reported to Cabinet and Cabinet Boards.
16. Since April 2019, the Council's quarterly complaints data has been forwarded to the PSOW to enable an all Wales comparison and the data for all Council's is published on the PSOW's website.

Welsh Language Complaints

17. 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. Three complaints were received during 2020/2021 (compared to eight during 2019/2020); two via the Welsh Language Commissioner and one direct to the Council. These complaints are detailed in the Welsh Language Standards Annual Report which published in June 2021.

Unreasonable/Unacceptable Customer Behaviour

18. 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 2020/2021.

Financial Impact

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

Integrated Impact Assessment

20. 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

21. No implications.

Workforce Impacts

22. 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

23. 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

24. 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 2020/2021.

Consultation

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

Recommendations

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

Reason for proposed decision

27. Matter for monitoring – no decision required.

Implementation of decision

28. Matter for monitoring – no decision required.

List of background papers

29. None

Officer Contact

Mrs Sheenagh Rees, Head of Human & Organisational Development
Email s.rees5@npt.gov.uk Tel: 01639 763315

Mrs Caryn Furlow-Harris, Strategic Manager – Policy & Executive Support
Email: c.furlow@npt.gov.uk Tel: 01639 763242