

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Cabinet (Policy and Resources) Sub Committee

4th October 2022

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

Matter for Monitoring

Wards Affected: All Wards

Compliments and Complaints Annual Report 2021/2022

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide an overview of the compliments and complaints received during the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.

Executive Summary

2. 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.
3. 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.
4. The reporting of complaints for the 2021/2022 has changed in line with the Ombudsman reporting requirements. Complaints are now reported on the % of complaints which are closed (upheld / not upheld) as opposed to the % complaints "received" in previous years. For the purpose of Cabinet, the

number of complaints received during 2021/2022 was 111. This is a slight increase from 102 received in 2020/2021.

5. Although the number of complaints received has slightly increased, the number of Stage 1 complaints upheld / partly upheld continue to reduce year on year. Falling to 19.82% (22 of 111) in 2021/2022 from 23.53% in 2020/2021 (24 of 102), 31.76% in 2019/2020 (47 of 148) and 33.8% in 2018/2019 (46 of 136). There was an increase in the number of Stage 2 complaints received from 14 in 2020/2021 to 25 in 2021/2022. However, there was an increase in just one upheld/partially upheld Stage 2 complaint.
6. With regard to compliments, there were fewer compliments received during 2021/2022, falling from 360 received during 2020/2021 to 249 received during 2021/2022.

Summary of performance 2021/2022

Stage 1 Complaints

7. There was an increase in the number of Stage 1 complaints received across the Council from 102 received in 2020/2021 to 111 received in 2021/2022.
8. However, the percentage upheld/partially upheld during 2021/2022 was 19.82% (22 of 111). This is a reduction on previous years. In 2020/2021 the percentage was 23.53% (24 of 102) and in 2019/2020 the percentage was 31.76% (47 of 148)
9. A summary per directorate is provided in Appendix 1.
10. 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.
11. No systemic failings could be attributed to a particular service area from the instances reported and investigated.
12. 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

13. There was an increase in the number of Stage 2 complaints received from 14 in 2020/2021 to 25 in 2021/2022
14. However, only 2 Stage 2 complaints were upheld/partially upheld (8.33%) - an increase in just one when comparing to the previous year when 1 of 14 (7.14%) Stage 2 complaints received was upheld/partially upheld.
15. A summary per directorate is provided in Appendix 1.
16. 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.
17. 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

18. There has been a steady year on year increase in compliments from 115 in 2017/18 to 360 in 2020/2021. However, in 2021/2022 there has been a reduction in the number of compliments received falling to 249.
19. A summary per directorate is provided in Appendix 1.

Reporting Processes

20. 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).

21. Quarterly compliments and complaints performance reports are produced from CPMS and reported to Cabinet and Cabinet Boards relating to services within their purview.
22. 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

23. 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.
24. 9 complaints were received during 2021/2022 (compared to 3 during 2020/2021); 6 via the Welsh Language Commissioner and 3 direct to the Council. These complaints are detailed in the Welsh Language Standards Annual Report which was published in June 2022.

Unreasonable/Unacceptable Customer Behaviour

25. 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. At the start of 2021/2022, 2 protocols were in place. However, following a review, 1 protocol was lifted during the year.

Governance & Audit Committee

26. The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 gives the Governance & Audit Committee a new defined assurance role around complaints. On 18th February 2021, the Committee receive the first report to facilitate the discharge of this assurance role. The Committee considered data in relation to complaints received by the Council for the first 6 months of 2021/2022 (both Stage 1 and Stage 2). The Committee also considered the number of complaints made to the Ombudsman and the Welsh Language Commissioner during 2020/2021. The Committee reviewed the

Council's Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy (March 2021) and made one minor amendment to the Policy (moving a paragraph outlining "what we expect from you" paragraph to earlier in the Policy).

Financial Impact

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

Integrated Impact Assessment

28. 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 Corporate Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy incorporates 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

29. No implications.

Workforce Impacts

30. 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

31. 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

32. 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 2021/2022.

Consultation

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

Recommendations

34. For Members to:

- a. Monitor the performance contained within this report.
- b. Note the minor amendment made by the Governance & Audit Committee to the Comments Compliments and Complaints Policy (March 2021)

List of background papers

35. None

Officer Contact

Mrs Sheenagh Rees, Head of People & 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