

Report to	Governance and Audit Committee
Date of meeting	16 March 2022
Lead Member / Officer	Cllr Huw Hilditch-Roberts /Ann Lloyd – Community Support Services
Report author	Lisa Lovegrove, Chief Internal Auditor and Kevin Roberts, Statutory and Corporate Complaints Officer
Title	Annual Complaints Report 2020-21

1. What is the report about?

1.1. This report aims to provide assurance on the complaints handling process. The report also highlights the number of complaints received by the Council and the Public Services Ombudsman Wales (PSOW) during 2020-21. In order to meet the needs and concerns of members of the public, monitoring of complaints is a valuable resource to aid continuous improvement of services. Complaints are taken seriously and offer valuable customer insight.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

2.1. The monitoring of complaints handling process forms part of the Terms of Reference of the Governance and Audit Committee in keeping with the requirements of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021. Performance scrutiny reviews complaints performance through a different lens to Governance and Audit Committee, the former considers performance in more detail, whereas the latter seeks assurance on whether the council has an effective complaints handling process. The annual PSOW letter goes to Cabinet at the request of the Ombudsman.

3. What are the Recommendations?

3.1. The committee considers the contents of the report regarding the process and performance of the council's complaints handling and agrees whether further information is required to assure itself that the council has robust system in place for dealing with customer complaints.

4. Report details

4.1. In May 2021, the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 introduced a requirement for Governance and Audit Committee to: make reports and recommendations in relation to the council's ability to handle complaints effectively. This is the first report to the committee and provides an overview of how the council manages complaints and the annual report on the council's performance in 2020/21. This information is used in the development of the Annual Governance Statement.

4.2. The Ombudsman's Principles of Good Administration and Good Records Management focus on six principles:

- Getting it right: In accordance with the law and authority's policy and guidance. Providing appropriately trained and competent staff
- Being customer focused: ensuring people can access services easily. Informing customers what they can expect. Responding to customers' needs flexibly, including, where appropriate, coordinating a response from other service areas
- Being open and accountable: Be clear about policies and procedures, provide clear and accurate advice. Taking responsibility
- Acting fairly and proportionately: Treat people with respect and courtesy without unlawful discrimination, ensuring no conflict of interests
- Putting things right: Acknowledge mistakes and apologise. Put things right quickly and effectively with information on how to appeal
- Seeking continuous improvement: Review policies and procedures regularly to ensure they remain effective. Asking and utilising feedback to improve services and improvement

4.3. The new powers created under the Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Act 2019 include.

- accepting complaints verbally, not just in writing
- investigating complaint handling when a patient's National Health Service (NHS) care is inextricably linked with private healthcare
- the ability to undertake 'own initiative' investigations when the Ombudsman considers them to be in the public interest
- gathering complaints data from public services in Wales on a quarterly basis (Complaints Only)

4.4. Appendix 1, report provides a summary of the council's complaints handling process and information on the number of Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints received, response times, number of compliments received. Key matters highlighted by the PSOW in its letter to the council is shown in Appendix 2.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

5.1. No decision required. Effective complaints handling arrangements contributes to the council's aim of being an excellent council, close to the community.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

6.1. Any costs relating to complaints handling are accommodated for within existing budgets.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

7.1. Not applicable as this is an information item.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

8.1. Reporting to Senior Leadership Team and Performance Scrutiny Committee.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

9.1. There are no obvious financial implications arising from the report.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

10.1. By not dealing with complaints effectively, the reputation of the council could be impacted negatively.

11. Power to make the decision

11.1. Not applicable, no decision associated with this report.