

Report To: Corporate Governance Committee
Date of Meeting: 14 November 2012
Lead Member / Officer: Jackie Walley, Head of Customers and Education Support
Report Author: Corporate Complaints Officer
Title: Annual Report for Your Voice 2011–12

1 What is the report about?

The report provides an overview of complaints and compliments received by Denbighshire County Council under the council's feedback policy 'Your Voice' during the period 1-Apr-2011 to 31-Mar-2012.

2 What is the reason for making this report?

The report will provide the Committee with an overview of the volumes and types of feedback received during 2011/12 and how the council performed in terms of handling feedback.

The Public Service Ombudsman for Wales publishes an Annual Report and Annual Letter. This report will provide the Committee with the council's response.

The report will provide the Committee with details of future developments that will have an impact on Your Voice.

3 What are the Recommendations?

3.1 That the Committee notes the suggestions about improving the council's performance in handling complaints.

3.2 Members to suggest any additional information they wish to be included in the next annual report.

4 Report details

Headlines

Recorded 'feedback' fell by 26% in 2011/12 compared with 2010/11.

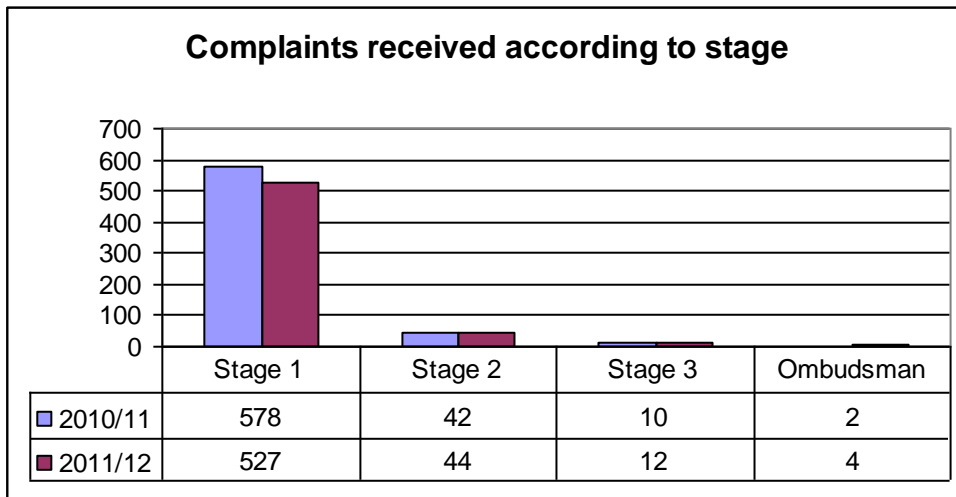
Complaints were 7% lower and compliments down by 42%.

The Council responded to 81% of complaints within the published timescales. This was an improvement on the previous year (77%).

Out of 587 complaints, 38% were either Upheld or Upheld in part.

There was a slight increase in the numbers of complaints considered at stages 2 and 3 of the process.

Complaints considered under Your Voice



The majority of complaints were dealt with at stage 1 of the complaints process.

The volume of recorded complaints decreased in 2011/12 yet the numbers being considered at stages 2 and 3 have actually increased.

Complaint outcomes

Outcome	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	Proportion
Upheld	37	24	27	42	130	22%
Partially Upheld	20	25	26	24	95	16%
Escalated to next stage	2	5	1	1	9	2%
Referred to other procedures	7	7	1	7	22	4%
Not Upheld	93	110	58	48	309	53%
Withdrawn	10	0	8	4	22	4%
TOTAL	169	171	121	126	587	100%

38% of complaints were either fully or partly upheld meaning the Council accepts it has made a mistake. It is an indication that departments are willing to recognise failings within their service.

Responding to complaints within published timescales

2010/11	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Overall
Total	162	165	144	161	632
Within	125	119	118	126	487
%	77%	72%	82%	78%	77%

2011/12	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Overall
Total	169	171	121	126	587
Within	141	156	91	87	475
%	83%	91%	75%	69%	81%

The council has a target of responding to 95% of complaints within published timescales. It can be seen from the table above that, despite an improvement during 2011/12, the council is some way from achieving this target.

Complaints made to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW)

PSOW Category Reporting	Corporate TOTAL	Corporate proportion	PSOW TOTAL	PSOW proportion
Adult Social Services	41	6.98%	2	5.26%
Benefits administration (Council Tax/Housing/Other)	1	0.17%	2	5.26%
Children's Social Services	39	6.64%	0	0.00%
Community Facilities, recreation and leisure	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Education	4	0.68%	2	5.26%
Environment and Environmental Health	199	33.90%	3	7.89%
Finance and Council Tax	24	4.09%	1	2.63%
Housing	79	13.46%	9	23.68%
Planning and building control	40	6.81%	11	28.95%
Roads and transport	68	11.58%	2	5.26%
Various other	92	15.67%	6	15.79%
	587	100.00%	38	100.00%

38 complaints were made to the PSOW during 2011/12. This was an increase from the previous year (31) and was higher than the Welsh Local Authority average (27).

17 were deemed to be 'premature' by the Ombudsman and referred back to the Council to be dealt with under our complaints procedure. This suggests that awareness of the council's own complaints policy needs to be improved.

Of the complaints received by the PSOW, only 2 were investigated. This is the same number as the previous year and is the 'average' for Welsh Local Authorities.

Developments in complaint handling

The Welsh Government (WG) and the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) issued a 'Model Complaints Policy' to all public bodies in Wales in July 2011. This recommended the adoption of a **two stage** complaints process. We currently have a three stage process. Appendix A provides details of how the change affects our feedback policy.

A 'Corporate Feedback' project is underway to examine the existing policy. It also relates to a wider programme of work to improve the customer experience by ensuring all services deliver a consistently high quality service.

It is proposed that we have two generic performance standards relating to feedback across the authority, these being:

- **complaints are handled within the published timescale; and**
- **service improvements are considered as a result of customer feedback**

Priorities for “Your Voice”

Work has already begun to improve the feedback process and the way complaints are handled.

There has to be a cultural change within the organisation about how we deal with feedback including the need to encourage complaints and improve how they are handled. This will involve ensuring a consistent approach to recording, monitoring and dealing with feedback across the organisation.

There is a need to improve how complaints are responded to and the aim is to respond to at least 95% of complaints within the stated timescales. There is a need to analyse the feedback and consider how we use this information to possibly redesign our services.

It is intended to introduce a ‘pre-complaint’ feedback element to ‘Your Voice’ in order to encourage dialogue and interaction with our customers. Ultimately this will improve the confidence that our customers have in the organisation and demonstrate that we listen and respond to feedback. This can potentially improve the reputation of the council as our residents and customers recognise us as a high performing authority.

5 How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

One of the corporate priorities for Denbighshire County Council over the next 5 years is the **Customer Experience**: to deliver excellent services and customer care (Pg. 9 ‘An Excellent Council, Close to its Community 2012 – 2016’).

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

The cost of reviewing and implementing the new policy/process will be covered by the existing budgets.

7 What consultations have been carried out?

Consultation on the new policy will commence in November. It was launched at the Middle Managers Conference in October.

8 Chief Finance Officer Statement

Not applicable

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

Not applicable

10 Power to make the Decision

Not applicable