



**Report of the Cabinet Member for Service Transformation
(Joint Deputy Leader)**

Cabinet – 19 October 2023

**Public Services Ombudsman of Wales Annual Letter
2022-23**

Purpose:	To present the Public Services Ombudsman of Wales Annual Letter 2022-23 for Swansea Council.
Policy Framework:	Complaints Policies Transformation & Financial Resilience well-being objective in the Corporate Plan
Consultation:	Finance, Legal, and Access to Services.
Report Author:	Sarah Lackenby
Finance Officer:	Ben Smith
Legal Officer:	Debbie Smith
Access to Services Officer:	Rhian Millar
For Information	

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report presents the annual Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) letter for 2022-23 and includes complaints performance of both Swansea Council and across the whole of Wales.
- 1.2 The Council recognises that in order to meet the needs and concerns of members of the public, the monitoring of complaints is a valuable resource in its requirement to continually improve services. All complaints are taken very seriously and provide valuable customer insight.

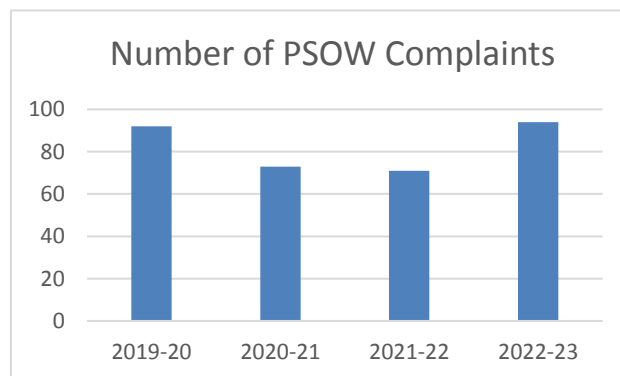
- 1.3 Requests for service are different to complaints (e.g. a request for service could be a request to repair an unlit lamp post, or missed bin collection). A complaint would only arise should the request for service not be properly dealt with.
- 1.4 The PSOW recognises there are limitations with the Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Act 2019, making it difficult to reconcile performance locally. Ombudsman cases received and closed are not reported within financial years and so will never match the annual reports of Councils. The annual PSOW letter is therefore a standalone picture of the Ombudsman's work and will not match the Council's Annual Complaints Report.

2. Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Annual Letter

2.1 The PSOW publishes the annual letters to all Councils on its website and is attached to this report at appendix A. The letter highlights activities undertaken by the Ombudsman's office during the year and the Council's performance and shows:

- The Ombudsman's office has seen a 3% increase in requests compared with 2021-22. This is double the number of cases compared with a decade ago
- However, the number of complaints relating to local authorities has reduced by 11% compared with 2021-22
- In 2021-22 the Ombudsman upheld 13% of local authority complaints
- The Ombudsman has launched a new Service Quality process to ensure the standard of service meets expectations
- The second wider Own Initiative Investigation will be looking into carers assessments in local authorities in the coming year.

2.2 In 2022-23 the Ombudsman received 94 complaints relating to Swansea Council (71 in 2021-22), which represents 6% of Swansea Council's overall complaints and 9% of all complaints received across Wales. The table below shows complaints over the past four years and reflects the impact of the pandemic:



- 2.3 24% (23) complaints related to Housing. These were across a range of issues with no particular trend. Housing has seen an increase in complaints due to clearing the Covid backlog of internal repairs, and the transition period to the new Oracle Field Services system.
- 2.4 Of the ten complaints that required intervention and reached an early resolution / voluntary settlement these relate to:
- Eight Corporate Complaints including: the Contact Centre (1), Housing Repairs (4), Rats (1), Council tax (1), and Housing (1)
 - Two Social Services including: Child and Family (1), Adult Services (1).
- 2.5 Further to the letter, the Ombudsman requests the Council takes the following actions:
- Present the letter to the Cabinet and the Governance and Audit Committee, which have subsequently both been scheduled in October. In addition to this requirement, the letter will be presented to the Standards Committee as the letter refers to Code of Conduct complaints which is within the Standards Committee's terms of reference.
 - Continue to engage with the Ombudsman's Complaints Standards work. In this regard the Council:
 - Continues to access training. The Ombudsman delivered training to Social Services in October 2022
 - Has aligned to the model policy. Swansea Council's complaints policies are aligned with the model policy and other legislation. The Council continues to regularly engage with the Ombudsman's office on any points of clarification or advice
 - Submits quarterly complaints data on time
 - The Council will write to the Ombudsman following the Cabinet and Governance and Audit Committee meetings.

3. Integrated Assessment Implications

- 3.1 The Council is subject to the Equality Act (Public Sector Equality Duty and the socio-economic duty), the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure, and must in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Acts.
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - Deliver better outcomes for those people who experience socio-economic disadvantage.
 - Consider opportunities for people to use the Welsh language.

- Treat the Welsh language no less favourably than English.
- Ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

3.1.1 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 mandates that public bodies in Wales must carry out sustainable development. Sustainable development means the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the 'well-being goals'.

3.1.2 Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process ensures we have paid due regard to the above. It also takes into account other key issues and priorities, such as poverty and social exclusion, community cohesion, carers, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and Welsh language.

3.1.3 This report is for information only. Any activities following this report will be subject to the IIA process as required.

4. Financial Implications

4.1 There are no specific financial implications arising from this report. Any expenditure on complaints investigations or re-dress payments incurred during 2022-23 will be reported in the Council's Annual Complaints Report.

5. Legal Implications

5.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from this report.

Background Papers: None

Appendices:

Appendix A Annual letter from the Public Services Ombudsman of Wales
2022-23