



**To/
Councillor Andrea Lewis
Cabinet Member for Service
Transformation (Deputy Leader)**

BY EMAIL

cc: Cabinet Members

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Scrutiny

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SPC/2023-24/14

09 April 2024

Summary: This is a letter from the Scrutiny Programme Committee to the Cabinet Member following the meeting of the Committee on 19 March 2024. It is about the Council's Annual Complaints & Compliments Report 2022/23. A formal written response is not required.

Dear Councillor Lewis,

Scrutiny of Annual Complaints & Compliments Report 2022/23

We are writing to you following our Scrutiny session on the Annual Complaints & Compliments Annual Report covering the period April 2022 – March 2023. The session enabled the Committee to ask questions on the Council's performance in relation to complaint handling and learning from complaints to inform improvement to services, practice, and processes. We thank you for attending the meeting and lead officer Sarah Lackenby, Head of Digital & Customer Services, for assisting the Committee.

Previously the Annual Report was reported to the Service Improvement & Finance Scrutiny Performance Panel, however following a tweak to Scrutiny arrangements this and future Annual Reports will be considered by the Committee instead. However, as there are separate reports for Corporate Complaints and Social Services, the report covering Social Services was discussed by our Social Services Scrutiny Performance Panels, so the Committee was able to focus on the Corporate Complaints report. Each report outlined processes, highlighted complaints, comments and compliments received from the public, along with key performance indicators, as well as

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complaints that were referred to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW).

We are aware that the Annual Reports are also presented to the Governance & Audit Committee as it has a responsibility to consider the Authority's ability to handle complaints effectively, so assurance is provided to it on the complaints handling process. We noted that the Complaints reports had a new format in response to a request from the Governance & Audit Committee.

The Corporate Complaints report provided some overall complaints figures and then gave a helpful breakdown by service area. Overall, the Committee noted an increase in the number of Stage 1 (1540) and Stage 2 (179) complaints on last year, including the number justified – with significant numbers relating to Corporate Building & Property Services, Highways & Transportation, Housing & Public Protection, and Waste Management & Parks. It was felt that this was in line with public interactions increasing post-Covid. That said, each of these service areas are also shown to receive the most positive comments and compliments, from among the 200 that were logged by the Council. There were also more referrals to the PSOW (94). Of the 99 complaints closed during 2022-23, of which 10% resulted in a voluntary settlement to resolve. It was clarified that the discrepancy in these figures (94 cases referred; 99 closed) related to some Ombudsman cases carried over from previous years.

It was highlighted to the Committee that the number of complaints received by the Council was a very small percentage of the vast number of interactions with citizens each year, and many of the complaints are resolved by the service department and do not proceed to Stage 2. For example, you told us the Corporate Building Services carried out 70,000 repairs during 2022-23 and received 380 complaints – representing a very small percentage of work done. However, the report stated that the Council recognises that complaints were a valuable resource, helping the Council to understand the needs and concerns of members of the public and to improve services and processes. You reported that all complaints were taken very seriously and provide valuable customer insight. The report also highlighted the positive comments that the Council had received, so provides a more balanced picture recognising the good work being done across the Council.

It was also noted that an internal audit of Complaints began at the end of 2022-23 and concluded in 2023-24 with the overall assurance level of substantial.

It was a very helpful and useful session, and this letter reflects on what we learnt from the information presented, questions, and discussion. It shares the views of the Committee and highlights any outstanding issues / actions for your response but, **overall, the Committee had no significant issues arising from the annual report.**

Breakdown of Complaints

Looking at the number of complaints received, it is acknowledged that Corporate Building & Property Services, Highways & Transportation, Housing & Public Protection, and Waste Management & Parks are the Council's main frontline service areas. However we can see that many complaints were not upheld. It could be the case that some complaints relate to issues or circumstances beyond the control of that service. The Committee was told that there would be various reasons for complaints not being upheld, but would include issues or circumstances being beyond the Council's control that may have caused disruption, e.g. vehicle breakdown, flooding; or complaints against parking tickets where there is a specific legal process to follow, etc.

Process for Registering Complaints & Compliments

We had a discussion around the processes for registering complaints and compliments and noted that majority are made online, however there were other methods for the public to get in touch. **We would like to see future reports providing information on the source of how these complaints and compliments have come in, e.g. whether online, email, letter, etc.**

You pointed out that the annual report reflected on complaints and compliments from members of the public, however with their permission councillors and officers can pass these on to the relevant Head of Service / Complaints Team for recording. There was also a discussion around the logging of compliments, to ensure that positive feedback / comments received from the public via councillors or officers are not missed. We noted that a new complaints system was introduced in June 2023 which has improved complaints handling, and the plan was to put all the compliments through that system as well so that everything is streamlined for the next year.

Reporting Timescales

The 2022-23 report covers the year up to the end of March 2023, so this is data which is a year old. **We felt this could be improved upon to ensure more timely discussion.** We were advised that the compilation of information can take several months but every effort would be made to ensure annual reporting on Complaints and Compliments can be made available earlier. We noted that the Council receives the Ombudsman's Annual Letter in September / October, so you told us you would aim to finalise the next report soon after receipt. That would be very helpful.

Your Response

We hope that you find the contents of this letter helpful and would welcome comments on any of the issues raised within; however, we do not expect you to provide a formal response, but we will follow up on the letter when we discuss the next annual report.

We look forward to seeing the Annual Report for 2023/24, which we can hopefully schedule during 2024.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Black', written in a cursive style.

COUNCILLOR PETER BLACK

Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee

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