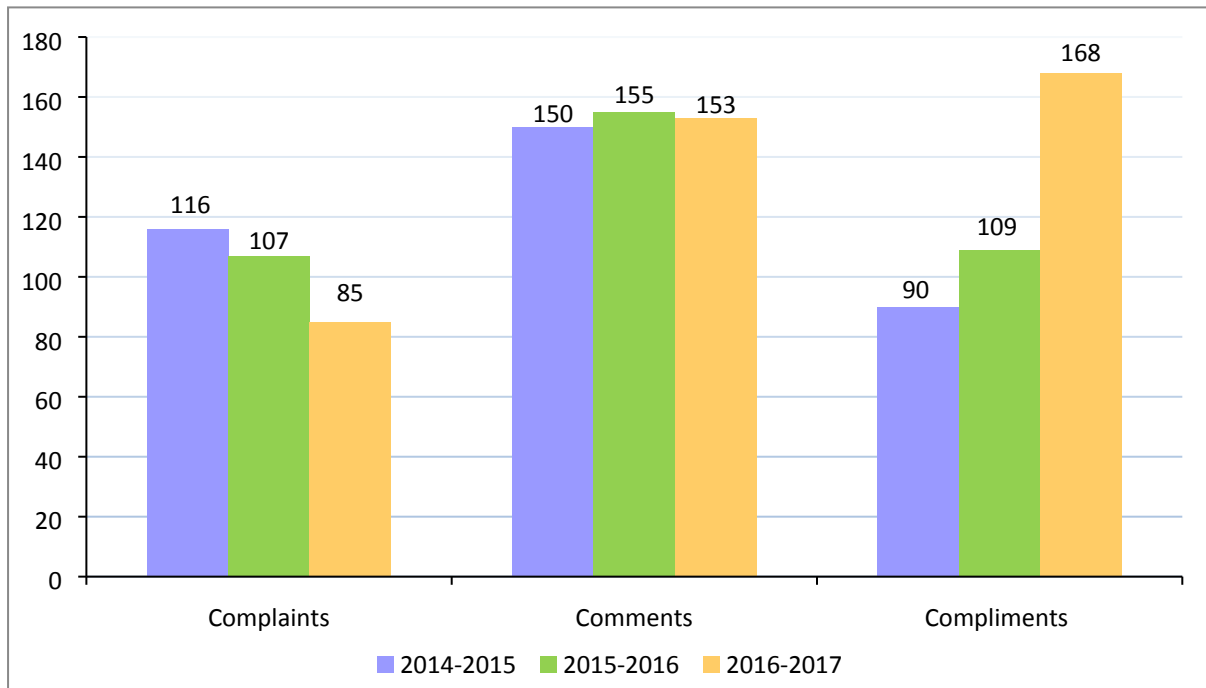




Whole Authority Customer Feedback and FOIA Statistics

April 2016 – March 2017



Complaints

- 85 Complaints received

Stage 1 - Informal Resolution

- 79 Complaints started

Stage 2 – Formal Investigation

- 10 Complaints received
- 11 Complaints started
 - 1 complaint proceeded straight to stage 2 (from 2015-2016)
 - 1 complaint escalated straight to stage 2 (from 2015-2016)
 - 4 escalated to stage 2
 - 5 proceeded straight to Stage 2

Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

Of the above 10 formal complaints received, 1 complainant went directly to the PSOW. He referred it back to us for subsequent investigation

5 complainants progressed their complaint to the PSOW after formal investigation. The PSOW did not investigate their complaints.

Complaints: Examples of most common aspects of services complained about:

- **Waste & Recycling**

Continued missed bin and food waste collections; garden waste not collected; issues with garden waste permits; poor service around household waste collections; hedges not being cut; issues with ownership responsibility of grass area; issues with refuse lorry and grassed area / footpaths; staff conduct; lack of response and not returning calls

- **Highways**

Lack of maintenance of the hedges and verges along the length of the lane; lack of response and communication on hedge / tree problems; lack of responses on reported highway issues; issues with naming of property; issues about Council's handling of highway matters; failure to respond within timescales; lack of maintenance and cleaning of drains in the vicinity of complainant's property;

- **Passenger Transport**

Issues with bus timetables and bus driving; poor school transport; denied school transport; feels that staff have mishandled information regarding allegations made; issues regarding decision to re-tender contract; issues regarding service users being transported on bus; issues about Grass Roots policy regarding clients using wheelchairs; incorrect information in bus stop

- **Development Control**

The manner in which the planning application has been dealt with; issues with site enforcement; the apparent lack of consultation, the action and response resulting from original enquiries; the way in which planning application has been handled; staff conduct; fencing on site not removed

- **Estates**

Issues regarding unregulated possession and development of council land; allegations that officers of the council have misled Elected members concerning the negotiations that have taken place in relation to the occupation of ***; staff conduct; issue regarding unanswered emails;

- **Leisure**

Incorrect swimming times shown on website; waiting time at the gym for equipment; enforcement issues regarding blue badge parking

- **Others**

- General lack of response from various sections of the Council either by phone or email
- Staff conduct
- Events – issues with noise; lack of notification and difficulties with residential parking, poor communication.
- Issues with the public toilets in Abergavenny.
- Footpath blocked which has been raised previously with no action taken.
- Issues with Library service and ordering of books.
- Issues about the way in which complainant was treated.
- Customers confidential business discussed in public area and handling of personal information;
- Issues regarding Elections – lack of communication.
- Issues about not being able to vote;
- Car parking at Woodstock Way Caldicot

Stage 2 Formal Investigations concerned matters relating to:

- ❖ Maintenance of land around resident's property. Unhappy with the work carried out to the hedge in front of their property and that the Council had breached their confidentiality to a neighbour who confronted them about the works.

There were five elements to the complaint which after investigation were deemed to be unfounded.

- ❖ Issues regarding the conduct and outcome of a Professional Strategy meeting.

There were a number of elements to this complaints, 6 of them were not found, one was found and one partially found.

- ❖ Issues regarding the termination of a farm business tenancy.

There were two elements to this complaint, one was found and the other not found.

- ❖ Issues regarding alleged lack of communication and negotiation about County Farms strategy and not renewing leases.

It was concluded that the complaint was not found.

- ❖ The lack of actions taken after employment ended with the Council.

It was concluded that the complaint was found.

- ❖ Regarding a forthcoming Election, numerous phone calls, voice messages, and email communication with the Authority was not responded to by officers in line with the Authority's Customer Care Standards.

There were three elements to the complaint, two were found and one was not found.

- ❖ Alleged failure to act on identified drainage issues after deeming it urgent in a site meeting resulting in further flooding to the property, which was preventable.

There were a number of elements to this complaint, six of which were found and four were not.

- ❖ That historic kerbs in St Johns Street Monmouth were removed and replaced by modern equivalents. This was done in a conservation area.

There were a number of elements to the complaint and they were not found.

- ❖ The manner in which a Planning Application was dealt with by the Authority. The complainant considered that there was maladministration of the application leading to injustice in the way the application had been processed.

The complaint was not found.

- ❖ Complainant felt his amenity had been unacceptably harmed as a result of planning permission being granted. Complainant felt that he could be overlooked in his rear garden which impacted on his privacy.

The complaint was not found.

Note: Social Services complaints are dealt with separately under the Social Services complaints procedure. **63** complaints were received, **81** comments and **118** compliments were made about the service.

Distribution YTD

	Total	Access to Service	Communication Issue	Data Protection	Decision Delay	Discrimination	Member Conduct	Quality of Service	Quality of Works	Reduction in Service	Result of Process	Service Delayed	Service not provided	Service Removed	Staff Conduct	Timescales
Overall Total	85	1	6	1		1		59		1	5		2	1	8	
Total Legal	1	1														
People Services	1							1								
Revenues, Systems & Exchequer	2							2								
Total Resources	2							3								
Community Hubs	4							2							2	
Contact Centre	2							1							1	
Local Democracy	4							4								
Total Governance, Engagement and Improvement	10							7							3	
Highways	10							9		1						
Operations Not Allocated	1														1	
Property Services	1							1								
Passenger Transport	9					1		4		1	2			1		
Waste and Street Services	25		1	1				21				1			1	
Total Operations	46		1	1		1		35		1	3		1	1	2	
Community Education Service	1		1													
Countryside	3							3								
Development Management	7							5							2	
Estates / sustainability	5							3		2						
Housing and Communities	1														1	
Leisure	3		1					1				1				
Tourism, Festival & Events	2		2													
Total Enterprise	22		4					12		2		1			3	

Animal Health and Trading Standards	1							1								
Total Social Care and Health	1							1								
Finance	1							1								
Future Schools Team	1		1													
Total CYP	2		1					1								

Comments

- 153 Comments

Total	153
Resources	19
Registrars	12
Revenues, Systems & Exchequer	7
Governance, Engagement and Improvement	18
Community Hubs	14
Contact Centre	3
Not allocated	1
Operations	76
Highways	25
Not allocated	1
Passenger Transport Unit	10
Property Services	1
Transport	7
Waste and Street Services	32
Enterprise	22
Attractions – Caldicot Castle	1
Building Control	9
Countryside	2
Development Management	2
Estates and Sustainability	1
Housing	2
Leisure	4
Tourism, Festival & Events	1
Social Care and Health	4
Animal Health and Trading Standards	2
Environmental Health – Public Health	2
Children & Young People	2
Access Unit	1
Future Schools Team	1
External	10
Not allocated to any SIP	1
General – covers all of MCC	1

A selection of comments received concerned:

- Registrars section: they send out a questionnaire after customers have received a service from them, therefore we do receive a substantial amount of comments and compliments about that service. A selection of them are below:
 - ❖ The Old Parlour (Registrar office in Usk) - Not an easy venue to find as the postcode takes you to the square in the centre of Usk. No signposts to help you find it.

- ❖ Quite difficult at times to get in contact with the Registry office.
- ❖ Customers were not told about the ceremony fee prior to the ceremony,
- ❖ Very convenient to have the office in Abergavenny (Nevill Hall)
- ❖ Registrar was late arriving, so had to wait outside longer. Felt they were rushed through. The songs chosen after the ceremony were cut short.
- ❖ Office is very small and not very welcoming. A more friendly environment would be nicer to conduct difficult conversations in. Waiting room could have more comfortable chairs and general information about what to do when someone has died.

Below are another selection of comments received about the Council:

- State of the graves in cemetery
- Council Tax issues:
 - Heard nothing regarding council tax arrears.
 - Two separate forms to be filled in with regard benefits - why can't it all be incorporated in the same form - causes undue delays and anxiety.
 - Issues with on-line and phone services.
 - No information on website concerning council tax bills/bands/areas
 - Given conflicting information which has led to them acting on incorrect advice from department.
- Development Control:
 - Would like to be able to address planners without feeling like they're walking on "egg shells".
 - Feel the pre application planning advice is too expensive.
 - Understands the Planners are under resourced and over worked but from a commercial perspective this kills business. They need to change their perception and become more business sensed. No issues with Building Control, but must have an integrated approach.
- Website:
 - Interactive form on the web is not user friendly
 - Issues with registering for e billing
- The coastal path from Sudbrook to Black Rock and Sudbrook to the second Severn crossing is seriously overgrown.
- Overgrown brambles and nettles on the footpath between Chapel Road and Pen y pound are extremely dangerous. It is almost impossible to walk the path.
- Hard to obtain information re: homelessness issues
- Leisure:
 - Abergavenny Leisure Centre - lack of cleanliness in the female changing room and toilets. General lack of cleanliness is very noticeable and very off-putting.
 - System put in place re: tickets being issued for leisure facilities - users queuing in the cold/rain although they have paid via direct debit.
- Lack of communication around the bike race. The volunteers who were used to put up the barriers were very rude to tourists.

- Children not receiving lunch time meals at school that they pre-ordered as either school has run out of the ordered food or other children have changed their mind and decided to have the food that others have ordered.
- Parking
 - Received a parking penalty charge notice but already paid the over stay fee.
 - Lack of communication regarding appeal for parking fine.
 - Unhappy with staff attitude.
 - Would like to know why the ticket wasn't given in accordance to the Welsh Language Scheme
 - Rubbish blowing across Fairfield car park into garden.
- Contact Centre
 - Was put on hold and held for over 5 minutes.
 - Issues with the process and forms for a blue badge
 - Issues with bus pass, requesting things that are not needed to support application and when supplying it, asking for something else.
- Operations
 - Tarmac has been laid on Fairfield Road, Bulwark, Chepstow but it has not been flattened down; Lane hasn't been fully resurfaced
 - Vehicle used for cleaning drains has dropped oil on the road at each location where the drains were cleaned. This oil will find its way into the Llangwm Brook, the Olway and the River Usk.
 - Called the OSS numerous times and reported that a significant number of road gullies in Pen y Pound and the access road to the Leisure Centre are completely blocked. The consequence is that, at times of heavy rainfall, the road floods and flood water gets carried down to the town centre. Furthermore a great deal of detritus is swept into Pen y Pound Court.
 - Street lights not working / Street lamp top replaced with modern one but has not worked since it was installed. A fall occurred due to no lighting outside property in St Helens Road
 - Overgrown grass / hedges / bushes
 - Grit box situated on property. Wants it removed from property and asked that someone claims responsibility for the box. Lack of gritting.
 - Road safety issues for eg: Possibility of some warning signs, in some way slow the traffic at the bottom of Common Road in Mitchel Troy to protect school children and pets. 30mph signs, speed bumps.
 - When will the road be completed - between St Arvans and Tintern
 - Roads / lanes / paths / potholes in disrepair and rubbish strewn. Damage caused to vehicles.
 - Temporary traffic signals not working and causing gridlock.
 - Transport
 - Bus stop displaying out-of-date times for 63, 65 & 69 buses
 - Children not allowed on school bus with no bus pass.
 - Issues concerning drop off and pick up points.
 - The service is either running five minutes or so early, or

the timetable details published on the Monmouthshire Council website are incorrect.

- Still waiting for a pass to be sent - grass routes.
- No 3 bus from Brynmawr, that goes into Clydach and on to Gilwern did not turn up at 1:20pm as scheduled.
- Transport to school unreliable
- Received invoice for post 16 transport, however pupil was not able to use the school bus for one month therefore incurring charges catching the Newport transport bus

Compliments

- 168 Compliments

Total	168
Resources	31
Customer Relations	1
Emergency Planning	2
Registrars	28
Governance, Engagement and Improvement	15
Community Hubs	13
Contact Centre	2
Operations	41
Highways	31
Passenger Transport Unit	1
Property Services	1
Transport	4
Waste and Street Services	4
Enterprise	69
Building Control	49
Development Management	9
Housing	2
Leisure	1
Monmouthshire Youth Service	6
Not allocated	1
Tourism, Festival & Events	1
Social Care and Health	7
Animal Health and Trading Standards	2
Environmental Health – Public Health	4
Environmental Health – Commercial	1
Not allocated to any SIP	4
General – covers all MCC	1

A selection of compliments received:

A range of compliments about the whole of the Council was received – staff thanked for their professionalism, their quick responses, their efficiency and helpful service.

Some examples:

- Registrars: many compliments about staff being helpful and courteous at ceremonies. Everything was professional.
- Building Control they send out a questionnaire after providing a service and therefore a large number of compliments received about their advice given and efficient service
- Compliments about Waste/Refuse service – prompt response in putting this right and helping to get queries sorted.
- Community Hubs: - compliments about helpful, welcoming and accommodating staff
- Development Control: Commending staff on their excellent customer service, being helpful, patient and efficient. Taking the time to meet with customers.
- Youth Service: Thank you's to staff from young people for organising events and general support
- Reception: Thanks for fantastic, friendly welcome at County Hall.
- Parking: Thanks for helpfulness; visitors to Monmouthshire commented on the reasonable pay and display charge and reasonable overstay charges;
- Operations: impressed with wild flowers on dull verges; thanks for cleansing streets; thanks for cutting grass / hedges

- **Response Timescales**

Our policy for responding to complaints at stage 1 is **10 working days** and for stage 2 formal investigation is **20 working days** plus a further 10 working days for Heads of Service to respond to the report's findings.

Whole Authority Timescales	2015/16		2016/17	
	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 1	Stage 2
Up to 10 working days	78	0	62	0
11 – 25 working days	18	1	14	4
25+ working days	7	5	3	7
Total	103	6	79	11

Requests for service

These are recorded and acted upon.

Total	18
Operations	13
Highways	6
Waste and Street Services	7
Social Care and Health	2
Environmental Health – Public Health	2
External	3

Analysis of Complaints / Comments

Year	Stage 1 complaints	Stage 2 complaints	Comments	Compliments
2016-17	79	11	153	168
2015-16	103	6	155	109
2014-15	100	25	150	90
2013-14	134	16	172	34
2012-13	106	18	83	50

Service improvements

Complaints are generally resolved on an individual basis. Most formal investigation reports make recommendations for improvements to processes. These are followed up to ensure the recommendations are addressed.

Here are some examples where recommendations have been made for changes to practices / processes / procedures, as a result of people making complaints.

Communications Issues

- Apologies given where appropriate
- Being mindful of confidentiality issues
- All conversations with tenant farmers in future in relation to terminating tenancies be minuted in order to provide evidence of thorough dialogue between all parties.
- The Council considers proper reference to the Gunning Principles when entering into any period of formal consultation.
- New standard letter introduced to accompany P45 forms / systems and procedures reviewed for termination forms
- Reminders circulated about the Authority's Customer Care Standards to ensure that response times for customers are adhered to.
- Consideration for alternative plans to be put in place in place to deal with potential high volume customer demands during election periods
- The Electoral Section consider alternative communication methods, providing key cut off dates and signposting customers to the Authority's web pages where important information can be stored regarding deadlines and where polling station information can be found.
- Officers be reminded of the importance of providing information to stakeholders and those affected by projects undertaken by the Authority
- Where reasonably practicable greater transparency and clear communication in the process is available to residents in regards to the audit trail of correspondence within the planning process, with specific reference to ensuring that, where a proposal is altered, there is written clarification of this from the applicant, available for public view, or the application form itself is updated and published.

- Where residents enter into a Stage 1 investigation with the Authority, the appointed investigating officer with the specialist knowledge relating to the area of that complaint make every reasonable effort to meet with the resident/citizen lodging the complaint as part of the process and not relying on an audit trail of communications. This could add a level of clarity between the individual and authority.

Highways

- Explore the feasibility of more litter bins for specific places.
- Contact the Town Council making them aware of requests for more dog waste bins
- Planting of mature trees for screen purposes
- A goodwill recompense provided as suggested by the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales for lack of timely and accurate responses regarding a matter that took a lengthy time for action to be taken.

Commentary

We strive to have customer services at the heart of everything we do. There are times however when we will not always get things right and we fall short of the standard of service we want to deliver.

When customers are unhappy with an aspect of service we have provided, they want to be heard, they want the issue dealt with quickly and for the solution to be effective. In handling complaints from customers we aim to be customer and outcome focused, to make it easier for people to let us know they are unhappy and for us to inform them what we are doing to resolve their issues

The number of complaints dealt with under the Whole Authority complaints procedure have gone down slightly this year. However, stage 2 complaints have increased slightly; we dealt with 11 formal complaints whereas the previous year we dealt with 6 formal complaints. Out of the 11 complaints received, 5 of them wanted to proceed directly to stage 2 and a formal investigation undertaken without trying to find an informal resolution to their problems.

On a positive note, compliments rose significantly, generally because people were grateful that we dealt with matters quickly.

We still receive a fair number of enquiries about issues across the Authority and earlier intervention and staff engaging directly with customers solves problems straight away, reducing the level of complaints received.

Enquiries are contacts made by potential complainants asking about the service provided. Where appropriate we try to resolve the problem at an enquiry stage without taking the matter forward as a formal complaint.

Customer feedback also allows us to continue to inform and improve the way we handle complaints.

Annette Evans, Customer Relations Manager

July 2017

Freedom of Information and Environmental Information Regulations

Activity Report 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017

	2016-17	2015-16
Requests received:	1045	1061
Requests closed:	1055	1057
Requests closed on time:	97%	98%

Requests under Fol and EIR are not segregated, and figures include both.

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	YTD
Resources	116	119	124	177	536
Legal	0	0	1	0	1
Enterprise	14	22	22	15	73
Operations	32	30	31	35	128
Governance, Engagement & Improvement	10	13	9	8	40
Social Care & Health	37	37	54	53	181
Children & Young People	18	21	23	24	86
	227	242	264	312	1045

Note: Distribution by Department is not precise due to the cross-functional nature of many requests. Department headings were those in use for most of the year.

Most common sources (stated or interpreted)

Main Sources of Fol Requests	2015/16	2016/17
Commercial	39%	41%
Press – not local paper	17%	22%
Campaigner	15%	13%
Political researcher	10%	9%
Local resident	10%	8%
Press - local paper	2%	0%
All others	7%	7%

Most common subjects (broad categorisation)

Main subject categories of FoI Requests	2015/16	2016/17
Social care	11%	12%
Council Tax/NNDR	10%	10%
Procurement/Contracts	9%	6%
HR and Staffing	8%	5%
Educational Matters	7%	9%
Highways	7%	4%
Public Health	5%	5%
Processes and Services	5%	9%
Intestate Deaths and Public Health Funerals	5%	3%
Housing	4%	4%
Assets and Equipment	4%	5%
Financial Information	3%	2%
Planning	3%	3%
IT and Software	3%	4%
Trading Standards and Animal Health	3%	2%
Structures/Contacts	0%	3%
Licensing	0%	2%
Waste and Recycling	0%	2%
Members and Electoral Matters	0%	2%
All others	13%	6%

Target for percentage closed in 20 Working Days

A target of 90% has been retained.

Trends over time

The number of requests received has grown every year since FoI came into force on 1st January 2005. This is common to the public sector in general and is not Monmouthshire specific. Up to the end of 2016-17, the Council has received 7259 requests.

The number of requests received by Monmouthshire in each financial year is as follows:

2004-05 (3 months only)	31	
2005-06	135	
2006-07	118	(believed that some records are missing)
2007-08	172	
2008-09	305	
2009-10	421	
2010-11	609	

2011-12	662
2012-13	780
2013-14	918
2014-15	1002
2015-16	1061
2016-17	1045