

<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>WHOLE AUTHORITY CUSTOMER FEEDBACK</b>
<b>MEETING:</b>	<b>Audit Committee</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>28<sup>th</sup> February 2022</b>
<b>DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED:</b>	<b>All Wards</b>

**1. PURPOSE:**

To provide Governance and Audit committee with information on the number and types of complaints, comments and compliments received and dealt with from 1 April 2020 until 31 March 2021.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

That members use the report to seek assurance about the effectiveness of the authority's processes for dealing with complaints and compliments.

**3. KEY ISSUES:**

- 3.1 Our Whole Authority Complaints and Compliments policy and procedure follows the Model that the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales asked each local authority to adopt in 2011.
- 3.2 The whole authority procedure has two stages; the informal resolution stage and the formal investigation stage. The informal resolution stage aims to resolve the complaint locally wherever possible by means of discussion and problem solving. If it is not possible to resolve the concern, the matter is escalated to the formal investigation stage.
- 3.3 Where initial discussions have not achieved a resolution, complainants have the right to make a formal complaint. Investigations are undertaken and the complainant receives a full response detailing findings, conclusions and any recommendations made. This is the end of the internal process.
- 3.4 Complainants can contact the Public Services Ombudsman if they still remain dissatisfied. The Ombudsman provides an external independent service to consider complaints about all local authority services. The Ombudsman is concerned with maladministration causing injustice and will normally require complainants to have used their local council's procedures before accepting a complaint for investigation. Cabinet received the Ombudsman's annual report for 2020-21 in November which showed that the number of

complaints received about Monmouthshire was 0.21 per 1000 residents, below the average for Welsh local authorities of 0.25.

- 3.5 This report also covers comments. This is feedback from members of the public about service quality which does not require formal resolution and therefore isn't counted as a stage one complaint but still requires a significant commitment of staff time and generates useful learning. The number of comments increased to 379 in 2020-21, more than double the figure for the previous year.
- 3.6 The service areas receiving the largest number of complaints are waste and street services; development management and planning policy and highways. Further details are shown in the appendix to this report along with a representative selection of comments and complements.
- 3.7 Not only is it important to deal with complaints effectively, investigating and putting things right for the complainant where necessary, it is also vital to learn from them to minimise the chances of the same problem occurring twice. It remains of utmost importance that services use the findings from complaints investigations and customer feedback, alongside data and other evidence, to prioritise improvements.
- 3.8 Work is presently underway to improve processes in areas where officers have identified the highest volume of service requests relating to services, one example being reports of missed bins. It involves a cross section of staff who will then test potential improvements before rolling them out to the whole county. This work is not about improving the complaints process itself but does give an indication of some of things being done to improve customer satisfaction.
- 3.9 The authority's customer standards have recently been reviewed and will be re-launched. This will be accompanied by a new training programme which will initially be delivered to staff in customer-facing roles before being made available more widely within the authority.
- 3.10 This report does not cover social services complaints which are handled using a separate process which is reported to Children and Young People and Adults Select Committees.

#### **4. OPTIONS APPRAISAL:**

- 4.1 There are no alternative options associated with the recommendations in this report.

#### **5. EVALUATION CRITERIA:**

- 5.1 The effectiveness of a complaints process is not always easy to assess. A low number of complaints may mean that an organisation has made it too difficult to complain or that customers see little point in doing so. A very high number of complaints could be a sign of real problems. For this reason, it is important to look at trends over time rather than any one year in isolation. One of the key metrics which does give a good indication of

effectiveness is the number of complaints that cannot be resolved by the authority and which require determination by the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales.

- 5.2 The related issue of service quality sits alongside this and is inter-linked since, if we are learning from complaints, our systems and processes should improve and we should receive better feedback and see less issues being logged. Again, this needs to be balanced against improvements in technology which have made it easier to report issues via app and chatbot as well as the traditional method of phone and e-mail.

**6. REASONS:**

To ensure that Members are aware of the types of complaints, comments and compliments received and dealt with.

**7. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:**

There are no extra resource implications associated with the recommendations of the report. The management of the complaints process is done within existing budgets. Where officers from other departments are used to conduct investigations it will take them away from their regular roles but there is not a direct salary cost.

**8. WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS IMPLICATIONS (INCORPORATING EQUALITIES, SUSTAINABILITY, SAFEGUARDING and CORPORATE PARENTING):**

No specific implications have been identified in respect of this proposal.

**9. CONSULTEES:**

Strategic Leadership Team  
Heads of Service

**10. AUTHOR:**

Annette Evans, Customer Relations Manager

**11. CONTACT DETAILS**

Tel: 01633 644647

Email: [annetteevans@monmouthshire.gov.uk](mailto:annetteevans@monmouthshire.gov.uk)