

SUBJECT: COMPLAINTS PROCESS

MEETING: Performance & Overview Scrutiny Committee

DATE: 18 NOVEMBER 2025

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: ALL

1. PURPOSE:

To provide an overview of Social Services complaints, compliments and comments received during 2024-25, which enables the committee to form a view on the effectiveness of the authority's complaints processes.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the committee uses the report to seek assurance about the process and performance for dealing with complaints, comments and compliments and makes recommendations where it identifies any shortcomings.

3. KEY ISSUES:

Accountability

- 3.1 Overall accountability for ensuring that the complaints procedure is followed falls to the Chief Officer People, Performance and Partnerships and the Cabinet Member for Equalities and Engagement. The Customer Relations Manager is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the work including recording, allocating, monitoring, advising on and reporting on complaints.

Policy and Procedure: Social Services

- 3.2 Social Services complaints are dealt with under the Social Services complaints procedure. It is a statutory requirement for the authority to operate a complaints procedure that follows the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014 and The Representations Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014.

The guidance on handling complaints and representations by local authority social services state that we must publish an annual report on the handling and statistical information relating to the complaints and representations we've dealt with.

The complaints procedure has two stages:

- 3.3 Stage 1 Local Resolution – The emphasis at this stage is to resolve the complaint locally wherever possible by means of discussion and problem solving.

This approach should allow for the quick and successful resolution of most complaints, to the satisfaction of the complainant. The emphasis is on achieving service user satisfaction rather than avoiding a formal investigation.

Stage 2 Formal Investigation – Where initial discussions have not achieved a resolution, complainants have the right to make a formal complaint. Investigations are undertaken and are subject to statutory time limits for completion of the investigation (25 working days). The complainant receives a full response detailing findings, conclusions and recommendations.

- If the complaint or representation is not resolved
 - If the complaint or representation is not resolved at the Formal Investigation stage, the complainant has the right to complain to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.
- 3.4 The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) will determine on a case-by-case basis whether to consider a complaint, but generally the Ombudsman is able to consider complaints made to her within one year of the matters complained about (or within one year of the complainant becoming aware of them).

Number of Complaints

- 3.5 50 complaints were made in total about Social Services. 22 related to Adult Services and 28 related to Children's Services.
- 3.6 Appendix one provides more detail of the number and types of the complaints received from 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025 along with figures for previous years.

Timeliness

- 3.7 65% of all Stage 1 complaints were dealt with in the prescribed 17 working days timescale. All the Stage 2 complaints exceeded the 25 working days timescale. Independent investigators are taking longer to investigate the complaints and this can be due to the sheer complexity of the case, their own workloads, availability of complainant / staff for interviews and cross-referencing file records of cases.

Comments

- 3.8 Comments are captured and logged in the same way as complaints. These issues are important as they help the authority understand where problems may be arising that customers do not wish to formally complain about, but want appropriate action taken to prevent issues arising in future.

92 comments were received during this reporting period. Adult Services received 75 comments, a higher number than Children's Services because a Community Care questionnaire is sent out monthly to service users and comments received from the questionnaire are followed up with the appropriate service areas.

Compliments

- 3.9 We value and take pride in the compliments received as it highlights all the good work that staff do.

76 compliments were received; 63 for Adult Services and 13 for Children's Services.

Effectiveness of our procedure

- 3.10 Appendix 1 provides an overview for the year, broken down by service areas and complaint types. The report highlights key trends and themes drawn from our database.
- 3.11 Managers reflect on lessons learned from complaints investigations and take the appropriate action to deliver improvements. When formal investigations have taken place, we produce action plans to improve practice where required and always apologise when things have gone wrong. Action plans are monitored by the relevant Head of Service to ensure that all actions are completed.
- 3.12 Social Services have a Quality Assurance group that reviews the outcomes of complaints and any learning from them is disseminated through the department's management teams.
- 3.13 The PSOW's Complaints Standards Authority has provided free online training and extended this into the coming year on investigation skills. This training helps staff and services to respond more consistently to complaints and in line with best practice recognised by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

4 EQUALITY AND FUTURE GENERATIONS EVALUATION (INCLUDES SOCIAL JUSTICE, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):

There are no specific implications that have been identified in respect of this proposal.

5 OPTIONS APPRAISAL

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

6 EVALUATION CRITERIA

- 6.1 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.
- 6.2 It is important to acknowledge that an increase or decrease in the number of complaints does not necessarily reflect a change in the standard of service provided. An increase may indicate the positive view that is taken towards complaints, and that people are more well informed about how to make a complaint.

6.3 Of the 5 complaints investigated at the formal stage in Adult Services, 3 complainants contacted the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW), whose decision was not to investigate. Of the 10 Children's Social Services formal complaints received, 2 contacted the PSOW, whose decision was not to investigate. This shows the Ombudsman was satisfied that thorough investigations and recommendations had been made.

7 REASONS:

To ensure that the committee is able to fulfil its role to oversee the effectiveness of the authority's process for dealing with complaints, comments and compliments.

8 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

For Social Services complaint investigations, the legislation requires that external independent investigating officers must be appointed for formal investigations. There is an existing budget for this work and we will endeavour to keep within the budget expenditure. However, we cannot forecast how many complaints will be made.

9 CONSULTEES:

Strategic Leadership Team

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