

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CABINET: 26<sup>TH</sup> MARCH, 2026

GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE: 23<sup>RD</sup> MARCH, 2026

“671 CORPORATE COMPLAINTS – SUPPORTING SERVICE IMPROVEMENT (DCR) –

The Audit Wales review of Corporate Complaints looked at the Council’s approach to handling complaints. This audit considered to what extent the Council’s complaints processes contributed towards achieving its well-being objectives, secured value for money and met corporate priorities. Appendix A to the report set out a detailed audit scope and key findings of the review.

The review was undertaken to help fulfil the Auditor General’s duties, specifically a programme of value for money studies aimed at improving the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of public bodies in Wales as required by section 41 of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004.

The purpose of this audit was to assure the public, Council officers and Members that the Council had appropriate measures in place to deal with complaints.

Audit Wales concluded that:

*“The Council has updated its complaints policy, but there are shortcomings to support its implementation, and it is not supported by an Equalities Impact Assessment.*

*Despite many complaints to the Ombudsman being about the Council’s complaints arrangements, the Council has not fundamentally changed how it handles complaints.*

*Complaints are not always responded to in a timely manner and there are some weaknesses in the Council’s complaints system.*

*There are opportunities to improve training and oversight of complaints arrangements.”*

Four recommendations had been made in relation to the review which were detailed in Appendix A to the report. These focused on further developing the Council’s complaints policy, improving functionality of its IT system for complaints handling, improving staff training and monitoring and learning from complaints.

In response to the recommendations, the Director of Corporate Resources, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and the Operational Manager of Customer Relations had developed an action plan which would be progressed by the Council. This was attached as Appendix B to the report.

In line with the Council's performance monitoring arrangements, progress against regulatory improvement areas would be monitored via the Strategic Insight Board Insight Tracker. Governance and Audit Committee would continue to be informed of progress against the Council's regulatory improvement areas through regular updates on regulatory progress, with Cabinet having final oversight. Progress would also be monitored by Audit Wales as part of the Council's annual audit work programme.

Governance and Audit Committee Members were being asked to consider the contents of the appended report (Appendix A), and the Council's response (in the form of an action plan – Appendix B) with any recommendations / comments being referred onto Cabinet for their consideration and endorsement of the proposed actions to address the recommendations.

Councillor E. Goodjohn asked how was the Council strengthening the process around service areas responding to corporate complaints and at what point the Council need to put in more resources put into the system to ensure that complaints were handled in a timely manner. In reply, the Director of Corporate Resources stated that in terms of strengthening the process, the Strategic Leadership Team and Heads of Services had recently had a discussion on the Audit Wales report and key part of that was understanding what was causing those complaints. From that discussion consideration moved onto resources and it was highlighted that timeliness of response was sometimes an issue, but understanding the reasons for complaints was key so that the Council could respond which may mean amending policies or practices as opposed to increasing resources.

N. Ireland (Vice-Chair) referred to Recommendation (3) and training for complaint handlers and asked for further information of the implementation target date. The Director of Corporate Resources clarified that there was quite a large number of staff so the Council wanted to ensure that it had sufficient time to reach out to all complaint handlers while ensuring that new processes and changes were also covered part of the ongoing training.

There being no further queries or comments, the Committee

RESOLVED –

- (1) T H A T the findings from Audit Wales' review of the Corporate Complaints (Appendix A to the report), and the response to the review findings and Audit Wales' recommendations (Appendix B to the report) be endorsed.
- (2) T H A T the report be referred to Cabinet for their oversight and endorsement of the proposed Council actions (Appendix B to the report) and to address the recommendations.

#### Reason for decisions

(1&2) Having regard to the contents of the report and discussions at the meeting”.

Attached as Appendix: Report to Governance and Audit Committee 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 2026

Meeting of:	<b>Governance and Audit Committee</b>
Date of Meeting:	<b>Monday, 23 February 2026</b>
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Resources Scrutiny Committee
Report Title:	Corporate Complaints – Supporting Service Improvement
Purpose of Report:	To advise Members of the findings of the Auditor General for Wales’ review of the Council’s Complaints processes and policy.
Report Owner:	Tom Bowring, Director of Corporate Resources
Responsible Officer:	Tom Bowring, Director of Corporate Resources
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	No specific ward member consultation has been undertaken. Regulatory reports apply to the whole authority and inform Scrutiny Committees’ annual work programme, the Cabinet annual work programme and the Council’s improvement programme. Progress in relation to areas for improvement arising from the Annual Regulatory Plan (including local and national reviews) is regularly reported via to the Strategic Leadership Team, Governance and Audit Committee, Cabinet and the Council’s Strategic Insight Board Insight Board.
Policy Framework:	This is a matter for Executive decision by Cabinet.
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Audit Wales’ review of Corporate Complaints looked at the Council’s approach to handling complaints. This audit considered to what extent the Council’s complaints processes contributes towards achieving its well-being objectives, secure value for money, and meet corporate priorities. <b>Appendix A</b> sets out a detailed audit scope and key findings of the review.</li> <li>• The review was undertaken to help fulfil the Auditor General’s duties, specifically a programme of value for money studies aimed at improving the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of public bodies in Wales as required by section 41 of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004.</li> <li>• The purpose of this audit was to assure the public, Council officers and members that the Council has appropriate measures in place to deal with complaints.</li> </ul>	

- Audit Wales concluded that:
- ‘The Council has updated its complaints policy, but there are shortcomings to support its implementation, and it is not supported by an Equalities Impact Assessment.
- Despite many complaints to the Ombudsman being about the Council’s complaints arrangements, the Council has not fundamentally changed how it handles complaints.
- Complaints are not always responded to in a timely manner and there are some weaknesses in the Council’s complaints system.
- There are opportunities to improve training and oversight of complaints arrangements.’
- Four recommendations have been made in relation to the review which are detailed in **Appendix A**. These focus on further developing the Council’s complaints policy, improving functionality of its IT system for complaints handling, improving staff training and monitoring and learning from complaints.
- In response to the recommendations, the Director of Corporate Resources, the Head of Legal and Democratic Services and the Operational Manager of Customer Relations have developed an action plan which will be progressed by the Council. This is attached as **Appendix B**.
- In line with the Council's performance monitoring arrangements, progress against regulatory improvement areas will be monitored via the Strategic Insight Board Insight Tracker. Governance and Audit Committee will continue to be informed of progress against our regulatory improvement areas through regular updates on regulatory progress, with Cabinet having final oversight. Progress will also be monitored by Audit Wales as part of the Council's annual audit work programme.
- Governance and Audit Committee members are being asked to consider the contents of the appended report (**Appendix A**), and the Council's response (in the form of an action plan - **Appendix B**) with any recommendations /comments being referred onto Cabinet for their consideration and endorsement of the proposed actions to address the recommendations.

## **Recommendations**

1. That members consider the findings from Audit Wales' review of the Corporate Complaints (**Appendix A**), and the response to the review findings and Audit Wales' recommendations (**Appendix B**).
2. That, subject to recommendation one, the report be referred to Cabinet for their oversight and endorsement of the proposed Council actions (**Appendix B**) to address the recommendations together with any comments from the Committee.

## **Reasons for Recommendations**

1. To provide for scrutiny of the findings of Audit Wales' review of the Corporate Complaints.
2. To ensure the Council responds appropriately and implements areas of improvement as identified by Audit Wales.

### **1. Background**

- 1.1 This audit examined how the Council handles complaints, including its updated complaints policy and the processes it uses to respond in line with that policy. The review considered to what extent the Council's complaints processes contribute towards achieving its well-being objectives, secure value for money, and meet corporate priorities.
- 1.2 The review also identified areas in the complaints process that need strengthening. The need for improvement is underscored by high numbers of complaints made to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales about the Council's complaints handling.
- 1.3 The review did not assess Welsh language complaints, complaints against Members, or education and social services complaints as they follow different procedures. However, it considered whether learning from these separate processes is being shared across the Council.
- 1.4 The review was undertaken to help fulfil the Auditor General's duties, specifically a programme of value for money studies aimed at improving the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of public bodies in Wales as required by section 41 of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004. Its purpose was also to assure the public, Council officers and members that the Council has appropriate measures in place to deal with complaints.

## 2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1** The Audit Wales' review of Corporate Complaints looked at the Council's complaints processes, including its updated complaints policy and the processes it uses to respond in line with that policy. The audit also considered how the Council monitors and learns from complaints and identified areas in its complaints process which could be strengthened.
- 2.2** **Appendix A** sets out a detailed audit scope and key findings of the review.
- 2.3** The review concluded that:
- 'The Council has updated its complaints policy, but there are shortcomings to support its implementation, and it is not supported by an Equalities Impact Assessment.
  - Despite many complaints to the Ombudsman being about the Council's complaints arrangements, the Council has not fundamentally changed how it handles complaints.
  - Complaints are not always responded to in a timely manner and there are some weaknesses in the Council's complaints system.
  - There are opportunities to improve training and oversight of complaints arrangements.'
- 2.4** Four recommendations have been made in relation to the review (**Appendix A**) which are:
- 2.5** **R1:** To strengthen complaints handling and support the implementation of the Council's new policy, the Council should:
- **R1.1** undertake an equalities impact assessment for the updated complaints policy and, if necessary, update the policy to ensure the Council meets its obligations under the public sector equalities duty.
  - **R1.2** integrate key elements of the Council's Policy on Unacceptable Actions by Citizens and the Council's social media policy, so complaints investigators can deal with vexatious and malicious complaints and social media commentary quickly and consistently.
  - **R1.3** improve signposting on how to make a complaint, to help the public to find this information more easily.
- 2.6** **R2:** The Council should improve the functionality of its IT system for complaints handling by configuring the system to recognise where complaints have been reassigned to a new owner, to ensure all complaints are handled in a timely way.
- 2.7** **R3:** The Council should improve the impact of staff training on complaints by ensuring all complaints handlers are suitably trained and kept updated on changes to the complaints system, processes and policy.
- 2.8** **R4:** The Council should improve its monitoring and learning from complaints by:

- **R4.1** improving the annual report on complaints to clarify learning and service improvements as a result of complaints.
  - **R4.2** including Council benchmarking data in the Annual Complaint report as well as PSOW data to maximise opportunity to share best practice with members of the Governance and Audit Committee and improve complaints handling.
- 2.9** In response to the recommendations, the Director of Corporate Resources and the Operational Manager of Customer Relations have developed an action plan which will be progressed by the Council. This is attached as **Appendix B**.
- 2.10** In line with the Council's performance monitoring arrangements, progress against regulatory improvement areas will be monitored via the Strategic Insight Board Insight Tracker. Governance and Audit Committee will continue to be informed of progress against our regulatory improvement areas through regular updates on regulatory progress, with Cabinet having final oversight. Progress will also be monitored by Audit Wales as part of the Council's annual audit work programme.
- 2.11** Governance and Audit Committee members are being asked to consider the contents of the appended report (**Appendix A**), and the Council's response (in the form of an action plan - **Appendix B**) with any recommendations /comments being referred onto Cabinet for their consideration and endorsement of the proposed actions to address the recommendations.

### **3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?**

- 3.1** Performance Management is an intrinsic part of corporate governance and integrated business planning which underpins the delivery of Vale 2030, the Council's Corporate Plan. Vale 2030 details five new Well-being Objectives which provide a framework for the next five years and how the Council will contribute to the national well-being goals. The five ways of working have been embedded in the development of the new Plan and are reflected in the work that will be undertaken to deliver Vale 2030.
- 3.2** External Regulation is an important vehicle for driving continuous improvement across our services. Progressing the improvement areas identified by our regulators not only enables us to demonstrate our commitment to continuous service improvement but also contributes to further strengthening our impact on the national well-being goals through the achievement of our well-being objectives.
- 3.3** The areas of improvement identified by our external regulators and the associated action plan produced by officers has been developed with the five ways of working in mind. The focus of these is on developing innovative ways of working that better integrate services, whilst enabling us to work more

collaboratively with our partners and citizens to involve them in improving service delivery. These improvement actions also focus on preventative actions that will enable us to sustain and future proof our services into the longer term.

#### **4. Climate Change and Nature Implications**

- 4.1** The climate change and nature implications in respect of our regulatory recommendations will be considered as part of the development of our response (action plan) where required and will identify mitigating actions required to minimise any adverse consequences.

#### **5. Resources and Legal Considerations**

##### **Financial**

- 5.1** There are no budgetary implications directly arising from this report, although failure to progress the improvement areas outlined in the report could have a negative impact on any future external regulatory assessments of the Council which could in turn put funding opportunities at risk.

##### **Employment**

- 5.2** There are no direct workforce related implications associated with this report.

##### **Legal (Including Equalities)**

- 5.3** The statutory duties of the Auditor General are contained within the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act 2021, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004, the Local Government Act 1999 and the Code of Audit Practice.
- 5.4** There are no implications directly arising from this report, although failure to respond to our regulatory recommendations could have a negative impact on any future external regulatory assessments and could result in a special inspection by the Auditor General for Wales if deemed that the Council is not meeting the performance requirements.

#### **6. Background Papers**

None

# **Corporate complaints – Supporting service improvement**

Vale of Glamorgan Council

November 2025

# About us

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# Audit snapshot

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- 1 The purpose of this audit is to assure the public, council officers and members that the Council has appropriate measures in place to deal with complaints. These measures should include proper handling, monitoring, reporting and learning from complaints.

## What we looked at

- 2 We looked at the Council's approach to handling complaints. This included its updated complaints policy and its arrangements to process and respond to complaints in line with this policy. We also looked at how it monitors and learns from complaints.
- 3 We did not consider the Council's Welsh language complaints, complaints against Members, or education and social services complaints processes as these have different procedures. However, we did ask if learning from different departments' complaints processes is being shared.

## Why this is important

- 4 The Council identified complaints as an area for improvement in its 2024 Annual Self-Assessment and proactively discussed this with Audit Wales as an area of focus for our work.
- 5 The numbers of complaints received by the Council have increased by a third since 2018-19. In 2024, the Council was the Council with the highest proportion of complaints to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) per head of population.<sup>1</sup> Whilst the overall number of complaints to the PSOW reduced in 2024-25, the five-year trend shows an increase in complaints. Over the past five years, 20% of complaints to the PSOW have been about the Council's complaint handling, peaking at 27% in 2023-24.
- 6 When a member of the public makes a complaint, this is often a last resort. They may have already been through different avenues to raise their concerns. Dealing with complaints can be resource intensive.
- 7 The PSOW sets out that a Council's complaints handling process should be:
  - complainant focused;
  - simple;
  - fair and objective;
  - timely and effective;
  - accountable; and
  - committed to continuous improvement.<sup>2</sup>
- 8 PSOW's guidance on the Principles of Good Administration recognises there is a balance between being sensitive to the needs of a service user and yet acting proportionately to maximise the effective use of public resources.<sup>3</sup>
- 9 Effective complaints arrangements help the public to raise any concerns and enable the Council to quickly address them and to consider how they can learn from those complaints to improve service delivery.

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<sup>1</sup> Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW), [Annual Report and Accounts 2023/2024](#), June 2024

<sup>2</sup> PSOW, [Complaint Handling Processes – Statement of Principles](#), July 2019

<sup>3</sup> PSOW, [Principles of Good Administration](#), January 2022

## What we found

10 The Council has taken steps to improve its complaints arrangements, but the Council is not always responding to complaints in a timely way and there are weaknesses in its arrangements to support service improvement and reduce the number of complaints. For example, in 2022, the Council implemented a new IT system to track its complaints and, in 2025, it updated its complaints policy. However, we have identified some areas which could be strengthened, particularly given the numbers of complaints to the PSOW about the Council's complaints arrangements. These include application of its new policy, IT system, staff training and oversight.

## What we recommend

11 We have made four recommendations to the Council about:

- further developing its complaints policy;
- improving the functionality of its IT system for complaints handling;
- improving staff training;
- improving monitoring and learning from complaints.

# Key facts and figures

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- In 2023-24, the PSOW received 77 complaints about the Council, amounting to 0.58 per 1,000 residents. This was the highest number of complaints per 1,000 residents of all councils in Wales.

- The number of complaints received by the PSOW about the Council has increased in four out of five reported years up to and including 2023-24 (**Exhibit 2**). This is in line with the figures reported by PSOW, which show a 37% increase in new complaints about all public services since 2019 and a 17% increase this year.

- Over a fifth of complaints received by the PSOW in 2023-24 were about the Council's complaints handling.

- The Council's own data shows that complaints to them have increased by a third since 2018-19.

- The Council dealt with 44% of complaints within target timescales in 2023-24.

- In 2024-25, the Council received 176 customer satisfaction survey responses and results show:
  - 19% of respondents think the Council responded in a reasonable timeframe;
  - 12% of respondents answered 'yes' when asked if their complaint was assessed and reviewed fairly; and
  - 27% said they would use the online complaint system in the future.

# Our findings

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**The Council has updated its complaints policy, but there are shortcomings to support its implementation, and it is not supported by an Equalities Impact Assessment**

## **The Council's complaints policy**

- 12 At the start of our audit, the Council's complaints policy was dated 2013 having adopted the Welsh Government's model concerns and complaints policy at that time. The PSOW confirmed that the policy complied with the model in 2021.
- 13 The Council adopted its updated Corporate Concerns and Complaints policy in June 2025. There were minimal changes to the policy. It now contains clearer definitions of what constitutes a complaint in line with PSOW guidance. However, we have identified some weaknesses in arrangements to develop the policy and support its implementation:
  - aside from those staff who had led on drafting the new policy, other staff we spoke to had had little involvement in its development and little awareness of the new policy;
  - not all staff we spoke to were clear on the standards and expectations set out in the policy;
  - there was no equalities impact assessment (EIA) for the revised policy;
  - the updated policy could be clearer on how staff should deal with malicious and vexatious complaints and complaints on social media.
- 14 As involvement is one of the five ways of working central to delivering the Council's well-being goals, involving staff in policy development helps ensure principles within the policy are carried out in practice. If staff are not aware of the policy, this risks inconsistent and poor complaints handling.

- 15 An EIA is an important part of the approach to tackling discrimination and promoting equality in Wales. Under the Equality Act 2010, the Council must assess the likely impact of proposed changes to existing policies or practices on their ability to meet the Public Sector Equality Duty. Our [national report](#) sets out the benefits of EIAs in supporting policy development and decision making.
- 16 Senior managers told us that the Communications team are responsible for identifying potential complaints on its social media platforms, in line with the Council's social media policy. Once identified, they start the complaints process by asking complainants to complete a complaint form. The Council told us the key consideration is whether the issues raised fall within the definition of a complaint within the scope of the policy. However, the new Complaints policy could be clearer on the process for identifying, dealing with, and monitoring complaints made on social media. For example, the Council did not integrate or signpost in its new policy the relevant sections of its Social Media Policy and its 'Unacceptable Actions by Citizens' guidance.

### **Information on how to make a complaint**

- 17 The Council has set out some service standards, so the public knows what to expect when making a complaint. Three service standards for timeliness are integrated into the updated policy.
- 18 Information on how to make a complaint is available in several formats and from different Council buildings, but online information is not always accessible. A search of the Council's website returns several different avenues for how to make complaints about service areas, including schools, social services and planning, and these are clearly labelled. However, we found it difficult to find out how to make a complaint without using the search function. From the 'Contact us' link at the bottom of the main page, the relevant button is labelled 'we are listening and learning', which does not inform the public that this is where they should go for complaints information. The Council has not yet updated the webpage with its updated complaints policy. It currently refers to the 2013 version.

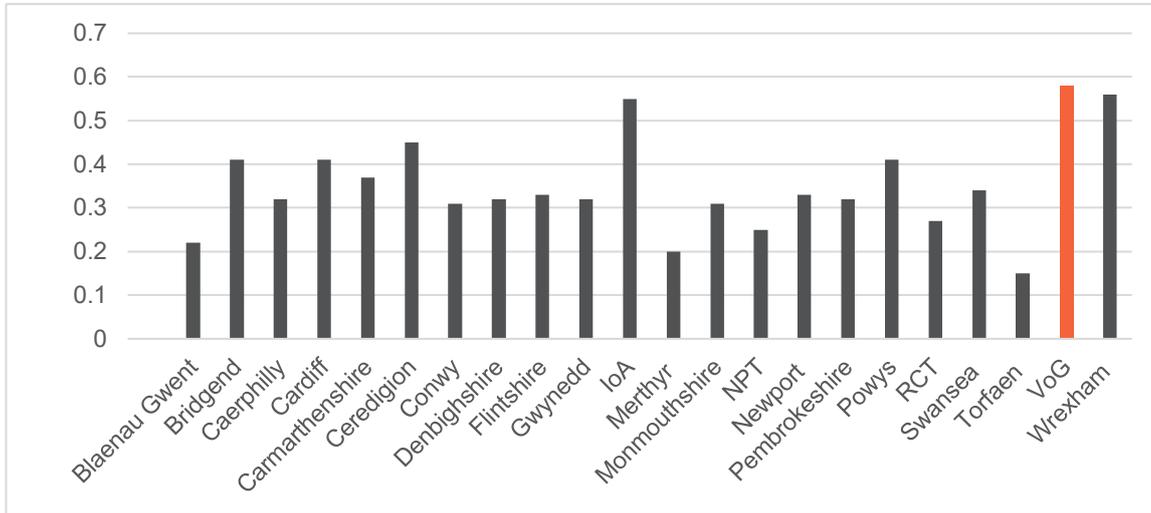
## Service planning

- 19 We found limited evidence that the Council's service plans take account of learning from complaints and improving services. This is important because learning from complaints to improve services is a key aspect of the complaints policy.
- 20 The Corporate Resources Directorate service plan for 2025-26 outlines the Council's ambition to engage with residents and get feedback. However, while senior managers see the Council's complaints process as an enabler to help the Council achieve its corporate objectives, few service plans mention complaints. Developing the 2026-27 directorate and service plans provides an opportunity for the Council to address this.

## Despite many complaints to the Ombudsman being about the Council's complaints arrangements, the Council has not fundamentally changed how it handles complaints

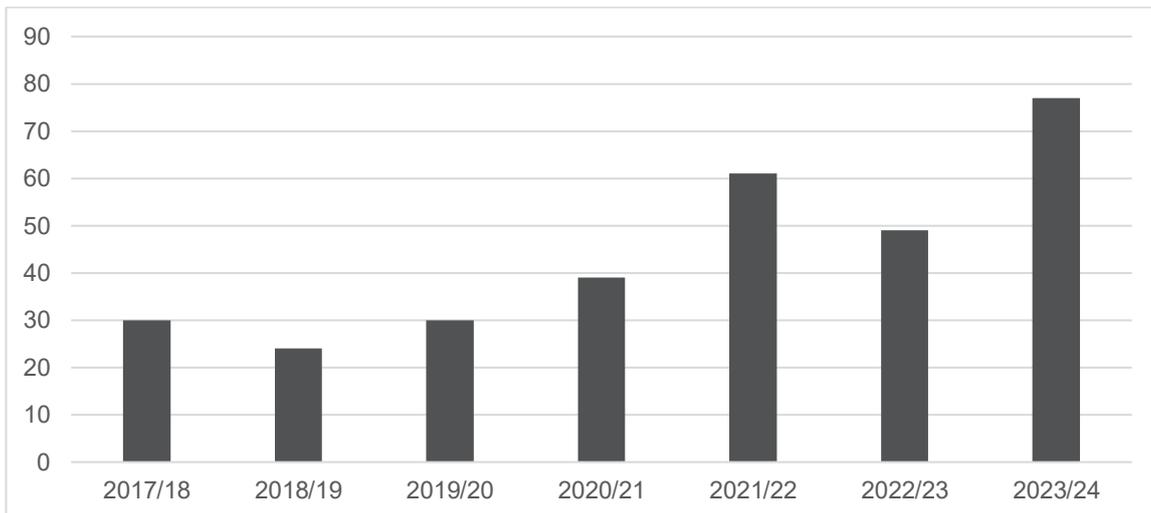
- 21 In 2023-24, over a fifth of the complaints about the Council to the PSOW were about the Council's complaints arrangements. Whilst the Council has updated its complaints policy, as set out in the Cabinet report which accompanied the new policy, it has not made changes to its processes and procedures for managing complaints. The Council mentions procedures will change in the future, but it has not outlined any milestones or firm commitment to do so. Therefore, it is difficult to see how the Council is going to reduce the numbers of complaints about its arrangements.
- 22 **Exhibit 1** shows that in 2023-24, the PSOW received the highest number of complaints about the Council per head of population than any other Welsh council. **Exhibit 2** shows how the numbers of complaints about the Council to the PSOW have increased over time since 2017. Over a quarter of these complaints relate to complaints handling.

**Exhibit 1: Number of complaints per 1,000 residents received by PSOW, by Council, 2023-24**



Source: [PSOW Annual Report to Vale to Glamorgan Council 2023-24](#)

**Exhibit 2: number of complaints about the Council received by PSOW since 2017**



Source: [PSOW Annual letters to Vale of Glamorgan Council](#)

- 23 PSOW data also shows that of the cases it closed relating to the Council in 2023-24, 20.3% were found to be worthy of some sort of intervention. All of these cases were settled with an early resolution or a voluntary settlement. Compared to other councils in Wales, this is the third highest proportion of interventions, in relation to all cases dealt with.

## **Complaints are not responded to in a timely manner and there are some weaknesses in the Council's complaints system**

### **Responding to complaints**

- 24 The Council aims to respond to complaints in line with the timescales set out in its updated Complaints Policy. Once a complaint is logged onto the system, there is a clear process for response and escalation if appropriate.
- 25 During 2024-25:
- 944 complaints were recorded;
  - 677 were resolved;
  - 267 were still under investigation at the end of the year.
- 26 Of the complaints resolved in 2024-25:
- the Council dealt with 44% within target timescales;
  - it missed its target of 65%;
  - performance was worse than its performance in 2023-24 (57%).
- 27 To help staff respond efficiently to complaints, staff use correspondence templates. Templates we examined are clear and in line with latest PSOW guidance, including guidance to follow where complaints span more than one provider or contractor. More recently, the Council is working on a 'Brilliant Basics' initiative to help improve customer service and has issued new 'Tone of Voice' guidance to all staff.

## The Council's IT system for complaints

- 28 The Council introduced a new IT system in 2022 for recording and tracking complaints. Officers demonstrated the system to us and we found it to be comprehensive and intuitive, with service standards and email prompts integrated to assist tracking. Feedback from staff is welcomed and the process for allocating complaints to investigators is being updated as a result.
- 29 However, our focus group with staff who manage complaints identified some shortcomings in the system. Staff told us that there were some difficulties getting accurate information from the system and difficulties reassigning complaints. This impacts on the system being able to accurately track the progress of complaints. We were told of instances where complainants had chased the Council for a response but despite the complaints being logged, these had not been progressed due to confusion over allocation. There is clearly scope for the Council to review the functionality of its IT system to ensure that complaints are handled in a timely way.

## There are opportunities to improve training and oversight of complaints arrangements

### Training and support

- 30 The Council delivers training on complaints handling, with the latest training sessions held in 2025. The training and guidance for complaints handling is included on the Council's Complaints SharePoint site. However, gaps in training and support are leading to inconsistency and affecting the quality of complaints handling. Training on the complaints system is available for those who regularly deal with complaints, but some staff we spoke to had mixed feelings on the quality of the training available and some had not received any formal training at all.
- 31 Training sessions do not always refer staff to relevant policies. For example, despite having a policy on unacceptable actions by citizens, this is not covered. Ensuring staff know how to apply this policy when assessing a complaint would help to identify vexatious and malicious complaints.

## Monitoring, oversight and learning

- 32 The Council has several mechanisms for reporting and monitoring its complaints:
- The Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee receives quarterly updates on local indicators, including those escalated to PSOW.
  - Senior Leadership Team regularly receive complaints data.
  - The Governance and Audit Committee (GAC) receives the Annual Complaints report which sets out a summary of PSOW interventions and Welsh language complaints.
  - Dedicated SharePoint site for complaints and performance dashboard.
  - The Council reports three Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) on complaints quarterly. These are:
    - percentage of corporate complaints dealt with within target timescales;
    - number of Ombudsman complaints upheld against the Council; and
    - percentage residents' satisfaction with how their complaint has been dealt with overall.
- 33 The Council understands the reasons for the increase in complaints. The staff we spoke to were able to articulate reasons why complaints are being made and some of the challenges the Council is facing.
- 34 The Council is building a supportive learning culture around complaints. Initiatives include regular bulletins to complaints investigators and a portal to report any lessons learned or good practice. The Council also sends surveys to people making complaints to understand how effectively they dealt with their complaints.
- 35 The updated complaints policy states that the Council will learn from complaints by relying on individual service areas to identify and embed changes to policies, procedures, systems or staff training. However, more could be done to better evaluate the causes and themes of complaints across all service areas.

- 36 We identified that staff were not always completing the Learning Outcomes open text section on the system once a complaint had been closed. There is an opportunity for the Council to encourage staff to provide fuller information to help it understand the service improvements identified and any themes arising to inform its evaluation and learning.
- 37 To date, the Council's actions have not impacted on improving response times and reducing the numbers of complaints. More work is needed to embed its actions and initiatives, and to analyse their impact to help the Council improve complaints handling and service delivery.
- 38 The Council is a member of the All Wales Corporate Complaints Officer Group, which meets regularly to discuss common issues. However, the Council is unaware of how its performance on complaints compares to other authorities, beyond those complaints to the PSOW. The Council does not publicly report benchmarking against well-performing councils.
- 39 The Council places responsibility on service managers to manage complaints about their service. There is no arrangement centrally to oversee handling of stage 1 complaints, which is left to individual managers in each service area to monitor progress. The Council is introducing a dashboard to allow this to take place by Directors. This was not in full use at the time of our fieldwork.
- 40 Under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, the Council's Governance and Audit Committee (GAC) must review and assess the Council's ability to handle complaints effectively. GAC can make recommendations to the Council on how this could be improved.
- 41 GAC considers the Council's annual complaints report. The format of the report reflects feedback from members of the GAC. The 2023-24 annual complaints report provides detailed information and commentary on systems, processes and basic performance data. But, despite examples showing how the Council has learnt from complaints, there is scope for the report to be more evaluative to help GAC assess if the Council's complaints arrangements are working effectively.

- 42 GAC considered the Council's annual complaints report for 2023-24 in December 2024 and the Corporate Concerns and Complaints Policy in June 2025. But there was limited discussion and oversight by GAC of how the Council has improved services and actions to improve timeliness. This was despite the Council's poor performance in responding to complaints and high numbers of PSOW complaints in 2023-24. At the time of our audit, the Annual Complaints report for 2024-25 had not yet been reviewed by GAC.

# Recommendations

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- R1 To strengthen complaints handling and support the implementation of the Council's new policy, the Council should:**
- 1.1** undertake an equalities impact assessment for the updated complaints policy and, if necessary, update the policy to ensure the Council meets its obligations under the public sector equalities duty (**paragraph 15**);
  - 1.2** integrate key elements of the Council's Policy on Unacceptable Actions by Citizens and the Council's social media policy, so complaints investigators can deal with vexatious and malicious complaints and social media commentary quickly and consistently (**paragraph 16**); and
  - 1.3** improve signposting on how to make a complaint, to help the public to find this information more easily (**paragraph 18**).
- R2 The Council should improve the functionality of its IT system for complaints handling by:**
- 2.1** configuring the system to recognise where complaints have been reassigned to a new owner, to ensure all complaints are handled in a timely way (**paragraph 29**).

**R3 The Council should improve the impact of staff training on complaints by:**

- 3.1** ensuring all complaints handlers are suitably trained and kept updated on changes to the complaints system, processes and policy (**paragraph 30**).

**R4 The Council should improve its monitoring and learning from complaints by:**

- 4.1** improving the annual report on complaints to clarify learning and service improvements as a result of complaints (**paragraph 41**);  
and
- 4.2** including Council benchmarking data in the Annual Complaints report as well as PSOW data to maximise the opportunity to share best practice with members of the Governance and Audit Committee and improve complaints handling (**paragraph 38**).

# About our work

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## Scope of the audit

This audit considered to what extent the Council's complaints processes contribute towards achieving its well-being objectives, secure value for money, and meet corporate priorities.

The scope did not include consideration of personal information, Human Resources process, or complaints about Members, Social Services or Education.

## Audit questions and criteria

### Questions

Our work used the following high-level questions:

- Does the Council have a clear and strategic approach to complaints handling?
- Are complaints handled professionally and efficiently, in line with the Council's complaints policy?
- Does the Council review its complaints arrangements to ensure they are working effectively?
- Does the Council review and monitor complaints to help prevent or reduce the level of complaints in the future?

### Criteria

We evaluated performance using guidance from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales and the Complaints Standards Authority.

## Methods

We reviewed 31 documents including:

- the PSOW Annual Report to the Council;
- the PSOW model Concerns and Complaints Policy;
- the Council's Annual Corporate Complaints and Compliments Report;
- the Council's Annual Complaints Report to Governance and Audit Committee; and
- the Council's Corporate Concerns and Complaints Policy (2013 and 2025).

We interviewed officers and members and held a focus group with managers and team leaders involved in complaints. We also observed recordings of Governance and Audit Committee meetings that looked at annual reports about complaints, and analysed data.

## About us

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The Auditor General for Wales is independent of the Welsh Government and the Senedd. The Auditor General's role is to examine and report on the accounts of the Welsh Government, the NHS in Wales and other related public bodies, together with those of councils and other local government bodies. The Auditor General also reports on these organisations' use of resources and suggests ways they can improve.

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Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg a Saesneg.

# Management response form



Audit Wales use only	
Audited body	Vale of Glamorgan Council
Audit name	Corporate Complaints
Issue date	7 November 2025

Ref	Recommendation	Commentary on planned actions	Completion date for planned actions	Responsible officer (title)
R1	To strengthen complaints handling and support the implementation of the Council's new policy, the Council should:	Equalities data in relation to complainants is collected, monitored and reported to Governance and Audit Committee and Cabinet annually.		

Ref	Recommendation	Commentary on planned actions	Completion date for planned actions	Responsible officer (title)
	<p>1.1 undertake an equalities impact assessment for the updated complaints policy and, if necessary, update the policy to ensure the Council meets its obligations under the public sector equalities duty <b>(paragraph 15)</b>;</p> <p>1.2 develop an implementation plan for the updated complaints policy that includes strategic objectives, and key performance indicators, and where relevant, integrating this into the annual directorate planning process. <b>(paragraph 20)</b>;</p>	<p>Action: A new equalities impact assessment will be completed and the policy updated as necessary.</p> <p>Members will note complaints metrics form a part of the performance management framework also.</p> <p>Action: An implementation plan will be created and delivered during Q1 and Q2 2026/27. Consideration will be given into the extent to which this can be integrated into the directorate planning process.</p> <p>Action: Policy to be reviewed to include appropriate reference to these policies, including links to the policies. Further, more detailed advice will be included for investigators in staff training and complaints guidance.</p>	<p>28/02/2026</p> <p>31/09/26</p> <p>31/03/26</p>	<p>Deputy Data Protection Officer</p> <p>OM Democratic &amp; OM Corporate Strategy and Insight</p> <p>Information Manager and Data Protection Officer</p>

Ref	Recommendation	Commentary on planned actions	Completion date for planned actions	Responsible officer (title)
	<p><b>1.3</b> integrate key elements of the Council's Policy on Unacceptable Actions by Citizens and the Council's social media policy, so complaints investigators can deal with vexatious and malicious complaints and social media commentary quickly and consistently (<b>paragraph 16</b>); and</p> <p><b>1.4</b> improve signposting on how to make a complaint, to help the public to find this information more easily (<b>paragraph 18</b>).</p>	<p>Action: Web content to be reviewed to ensure that the complaints content is easily accessible by navigation and through use of appropriate search terms.</p>	<p>31/01/26</p>	<p>OM Communications</p>
<p><b>R2</b></p>	<p><b>The Council should improve the functionality of its IT system for complaints handling by:</b></p>			

Ref	Recommendation	Commentary on planned actions	Completion date for planned actions	Responsible officer (title)
	<p>2.1 configuring the system to recognise where complaints have been reassigned to a new owner, to ensure all complaints are handled in a timely way <b>(paragraph 29)</b>.</p>	<p>The complaints team has regularly reviewed process design and functionality to ensure that the complaints are visible and can be managed efficiently. Action: Undertake a review of how the assignment of work is currently undertaken and improve functionality of the system wherever possible.</p>	31/03/26	OM Digital Transform

R3	<p><b>The Council should improve the impact of staff training on complaints by:</b></p>	<p>Action: Engage with colleagues who have responsibility for investigating complaints to identify any gaps in knowledge or capability and develop a plan to address this, including use of the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales training resources. Resources will continue to be made available on the Complaints Sharepoint site.</p>	31/12/26	<p>Information Manager and Data Protection Officer</p>
3.1	<p>ensuring all complaints handlers are suitably trained and kept updated on changes to the complaints system, processes and policy (<b>paragraph 30</b>).</p>			

Ref	Recommendation	Commentary on planned actions	Completion date for planned actions	Responsible officer (title)
R4	<p><b>The Council should improve its monitoring and learning from complaints by:</b></p> <p>4.1 improving the annual report on complaints to clarify learning and service improvements as a result of complaints (paragraph 41); and</p>	<p>The council has been working to improve complaints reporting and capture what has been learned and improved from complaint investigations.</p> <p>Action: Undertake a review to establish how this information can be recorded and reported in a consistent and meaningful way, and how the data can be applied to improve both individual services and more widely across the organisation. The review will engage with colleagues who undertake complaint investigations and will be informed by best practice research. Outcomes will be reported quarterly to the Strategic Leadership Team and overall conclusions incorporated into the 2025/26 Annual Complaints &amp; Compliments Report.</p>	<p>30/11/26</p> <p>30/11/26</p>	<p>Information Manager and Data Protection Officer</p>

Ref	Recommendation	Commentary on planned actions	Completion date for planned actions	Responsible officer (title)
	<p><b>4.2</b> including council benchmarking data in the Annual Complaints report as well as PSOW data to maximise the opportunity to share best practice with members of the Governance and Audit Committee and improve complaints handling (paragraph 38).</p>	<p>Action: Content will be included in the 2025/26 Annual Report and will be reported quarterly to the Strategic Leadership Team and annually to the Governance &amp; Audit Committee.</p>		<p>Information Manager and Data Protection Officer</p>