

Meeting of:	Governance and Audit Committee
Date of Meeting:	Monday, 11 December 2023
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	All Scrutiny Committees
Report Title:	Corporate Complaints Annual Report 2022/23
Purpose of Report:	To allow consideration of corporate complaints received from customers and the Public Service Ombudsman's Annual Letter for the corresponding period
Report Owner:	Tom Bowring, Director of Corporate Resources
Responsible Officer:	Tom Bowring, Director of Corporate Resources
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	There are no matters in this report which relate to an individual ward
Policy Framework:	This is a matter for Executive decision
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council adopted the Welsh Government's Model Corporate Concerns and Complaints Policy in July 2013. Complainants who remain unsatisfied after Stages 1 and 2 of the Policy are able to refer their complaint to the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW). • In May 2021 the PSOW confirmed that the Council's policy conformed with its model policy. • Recording and management of Complaints and Compliments transferred from Oracle CRM to the Granicus GovService platform in August 2022. These exclude Social Services complaints which are resolved via a different procedure and are reported separately. • The Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act (2021) requires the Governance and Audit Committee to review and assess the Authority's ability to handle complaints effectively and to make reports and recommendations in relation to the Authority's ability to handle complaints effectively. These provisions are included in Part 6 of the legislation relating to the Performance and Governance of Principal Councils and Duty of Principal Council to keep its performance under review. • The purpose of the policy is to ensure that complainants experience a consistent and fair response. Recording and monitoring of complaints allows the council to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Gain insight into citizens' satisfaction with services provided. ○ Understand how satisfied customers are with how we investigate complaints. 	

- Monitor responsiveness to statutory guidance and customer expectations regarding how quickly we complete complaints investigations.
 - Identify potential for improving service by analysing what has been learned from complaints.
- Analysis of complaints information for 2022/23 shows an increase in the number of complaints received to 495 (358) line with the long-term trend of increasing complaints, and above the 9-year annual average of 390.
 - Responsiveness, in terms of adherence to deadlines, continues to decline
 - Complaint handling is meeting the requirements of statutory bodies
 - An increased focus on learning from complaints is required.
- The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) received 49 complaints relating to the Council during the period. This represents a significant reduction compared to the 61 received in 2021/22 but remains above the longer-term average. No complaints were taken into investigation; however, 15 complaints were resolved through Early Resolution and 15 (25) were considered to be Premature. 4 (8) were out of jurisdiction and 19 (19) were other cases closed after initial consideration. The full PSOW Annual Letter (2022/23) is provided in Appendix B.
- The Annual Report details complaint performance for Directorates for 2022/23 and includes performance trends since 2014/15
- In April 2022 the Council implemented the Unacceptable Actions by Citizens and Social Media Policies. The new Policy on Unacceptable Actions by Citizens has not been applied to any citizen since its adoption.
- As of the date of this report 12 accounts have been blocked on 'X' and 14 on Facebook under the Social Media Policy.

Recommendations

1. That Governance and Audit Committee note the contents of the report and Appendix A (Annual Complaints & Compliments Report).
2. That Governance and Audit Committee continues to receive an annual update in relation to Corporate Complaints and Compliments.
3. That Governance and Audit Committee refer this report and the comments of the Committee to Cabinet for their consideration.

Reasons for Recommendations

1. & 2 To ensure effective monitoring of corporate complaints as an indicator of citizen satisfaction with service provided.
3. In order that Cabinet can be apprised of the report and the comments made by Governance and Audit Committee and reply to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales Annual Letter.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Council operates a two-stage process for handling complaints from residents. Should the complainant remain unsatisfied at the end of this process they are advised to contact the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW).
- 1.2 The contents of this year's report are generated from data entered on to Oracle Customer Relationship Management system and Granicus GovService platform by Customer Relations, service based staff and directly by residents.
- 1.3 Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee receives quarterly updates on local performance indicators relating to complaint handling, including those escalated to the PSOW.
- 1.4 Management of complaints transferred to the GovService platform in August 2022. Since then, service managers have benefitted from additional functionality including automatic email notifications when complaints are recorded for their service and 2 working days before individual complaint deadlines are reached.
- 1.5 An annual complaints and compliments report has been produced for the nine financial years since 2014/15. Appendix A provides Committee with the Annual Complaints and Compliments Report for 2021/22, including detailed performance information.
- 1.6 The report includes separate reporting of the Place Directorate performance for the first time, with figure previously included under Corporate Resources performance.
- 1.7 Following a recommendation from Corporate Performance and Resources Scrutiny Committee (14 April 2021) the Annual Complaints and Compliments Report includes information relating to the application of the Unreasonable Actions by Citizens and Social Media Policies.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1** The total number of complaints received during 2022/23 increased by 137 compared to the previous year from 358 to 495, above the 9-year average of 390.
- 2.2** The Council operated under unusual circumstances during the previous 2 reporting periods with the impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic still being felt. The number of complaints received, while significantly higher than the previous year is lower than 2018/19 figure of 559, the last year unaffected by the pandemic. While it is difficult to draw conclusions the trend over the 9 year period is one of increasing numbers of recorded complaints.
- 2.3** One key indicator of complainant satisfaction with the quality of complaint investigation and the fairness of outcomes is the percentage of complaints escalated past Stage 1. During 2021/22 only 10% of complaints were escalated to Stage 2 of the procedure. 2022/23 saw a significant reduction in complaints escalated to stage 2 at 5.5%. This represents a clear indication that corporate complaints continue to be investigated well and effectively across the Council.
- 2.4** In a continuation of previous years, distribution of complaints reflects the high number of direct citizen interactions delivered by the Environment and Housing Directorate which accounted for 343 complaints. However, this represents a reduction in this Directorate's share of total for the Council as a whole from 76.5% (274) to 69.3% of all complaints.
- 2.5** With 10 complaints raised Learning and Skills received the fewest number of complaints, this is an increase of 7 compared to 2021/22. Managing Director and Resources Directorate also saw an increase, receiving 94 Stage 1 complaints (68) and 2 Stage 2 complaints (3) during the period, an increase of 16% on the previous year. The Place Directorate received 36 Stage 1 and 10 Stage 2 complaints.
- 2.6** Waste Management continues to account for the highest number of complaints received by a single service at 128, although this is a reduction of 19 on the previous year. This represents 46.7% of the Directorate total and 25.9% of the total number of complaints received by the Council.
- 2.7** As of the date of this report 20.2% of complaints received have no recorded outcome. 45.3% of complaints were upheld in full or in part, which is static compared to 2021/22.
- 2.8** Performance in relation to responsiveness to complaints is now reported on a quarterly basis to the PSOW Compliance Standards authority. Overall, the Council performance in resolving complaints within target timescales continues to decline with only 59.2 (61%) resolved within target (2020/21 64.2%). This compares to the best performance in 2016/17 of 75.1%. It should be noted that 11 complaints were received by the PSOW regarding complaint handling from Vale of Glamorgan residents during 2022/23.

- 2.9** 55.8% of Environment and Housing complaints were resolved within target, Corporate Resources achieved 59.2%, Learning and Skills achieved 37.5% and Place 86%.
- 2.10** In August 2022 the complaints process was moved from Oracle CRM to the GovService platform. The new platform allows for automated, timed notifications to be sent to complaint owners when time scales are about to be breached. In addition, where investigations cannot be processed because information is required from the complainant the process can be placed “on hold” to ensure that a better the time taken to investigate the complaint can be better reflected. It is anticipated, as colleagues become more used to administrating the system, that this will help the Council to achieve improved performance in this area going forward.
- 2.11** Learning from complaints continues to be a key area for improvement as it provides the opportunity for services to manage customer expectations and to make improvements in service delivery where possible.
- 2.12** A total of 14 examples of how services have been improved as a result of learning from undertaking complaints investigations. Common themes include Improving Communications, Responding Within Timescales and Reinforcing Adherence to Policy and Procedures. Details are included in the Annual Complaints and Compliments Report.
- 2.13** There has been a significant improvement in recording of causes of complaints since administration was moved to the GovService platform with 100% adherence since August 2022. For 2022/23 29.2% of complaints had no recorded cause, compared to 67.7% in 2021/22, reversing a long term decline in this area of performance. For those complaints where a cause has been recorded ‘Service Standards Not Met’ accounted for 41.3%, ‘Policy and Process Not Followed’ 10.6% and ‘Staff Behaviour’ 7.8%.
- 2.14** ‘No Learning’ was recorded against 35.5% of complaints, as significant improvement on the 2021/22 performance of 88.5%. ‘Staff Training’ was recorded as a learning outcome against 25%, ‘Review and Revise Information/ Communication’ accounting for 18.4 and Review Service Standards 12%.
- 2.15** In the PSOW Annual Letter 2022/23 (Appendix B) 49 complaints are recorded from vale of Glamorgan residents a reduction of 12 on the previous year. No complaints were taken into investigation and 15 were resolved through the PSOW Early Resolution process.
- 2.16** In April 2022 Cabinet (ref C904) approved the introduction of new Unacceptable Actions by Citizens and Social Media Policies. The policies recognise that opportunities for interaction with the Council and its officers have multiplied with increasing popularity of social media platforms. Communication is quick and easy but could quickly become intrusive and difficult to manage on both professional and private profiles.
- 2.17** Since its adoption, the Policy on Unacceptable Actions by Citizens has not been applied to any resident.

- 2.18** 12 accounts have been blocked on 'X' (previously known as Twitter) and 14 on Facebook under the Social Media Policy.

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

- 3.1** Listening to and understanding complaints is a key source of the "voice of the customer", what they need from us and involving them in decisions about how we deliver services.
- 3.2** Learning from complaints is an important way in which the Council can develop services that meet the changing needs of residents and are sustainable. Similarly, services can be improved to prevent complaints occurring in the future and improve access to and delivery of services.
- 3.3** The Council's Corporate Plan (and Annual Delivery Plan) include commitments to improving customer service and engagement with our communities. Learning from and effectively handling complaints is a key element of this work.

4. Climate Change and Nature Implications

- 4.1** There are no matters in this report relating to climate change and nature.

5. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 5.1** There are no direct financial implications associated with this report.
- 5.2** The PSOW has powers to require the Council to compensate complainants financially should it be found guilty of maladministration. Effective investigation and management of complaints will minimise the risk of this happening.

Employment

- 5.3** There are no matters in this report relating to employment matters

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 5.4** Under part 6 of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021, section 115, Governance and Audit Committee are given statutory functions, with effect from 1st April 2021, to "review and assess the authority's ability to handle complaints effectively" and "make reports and recommendations in relation to the authority's ability to handle complaints effectively".
- 5.5** There is no statutory requirement to adopt the Model Concerns and Complaints Policy and Guidance for Public Service providers in Wales. However, the Welsh Government and PSOW have commended its adoption.
- 5.6** The Council's complaints process is promoted online and via leaflets at reception points. Complaints can be registered on the website, using the mobile app, by

post and by telephone. This ensures that all residents are aware of and have access to the complaints process irrespective of age, gender, belief or disability.

6. Background Papers

Appendix A - Annual Corporate Complaints and Compliments Report 2022/23

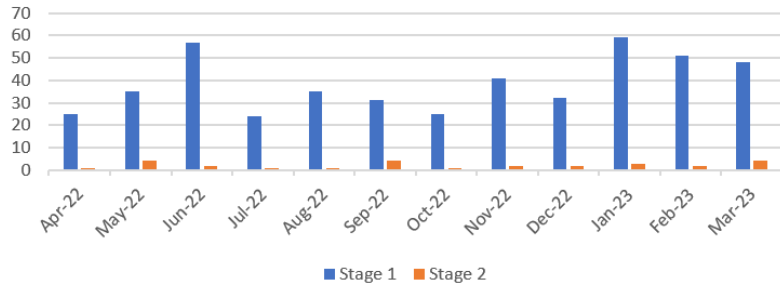
Appendix B – Public Service Ombudsman for Wales Annual letter 2022/23



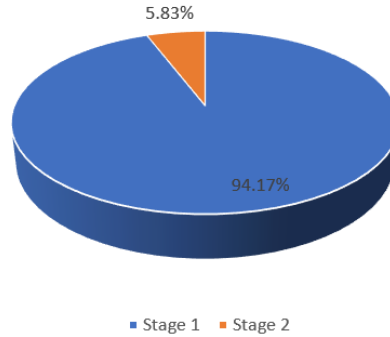
Vale of Glamorgan Council

**Annual Complaints
&
Compliments Report
2022/23**

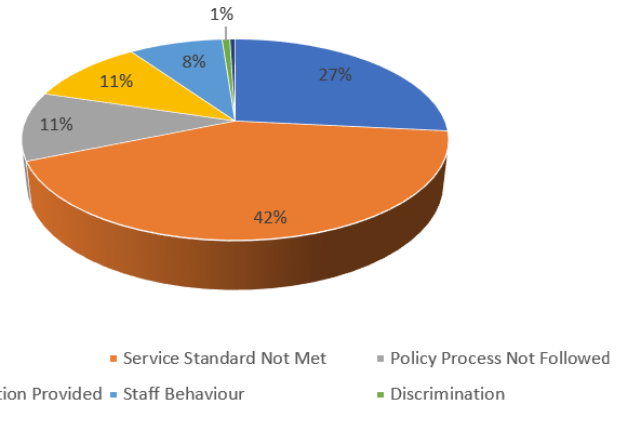
Stage 1 & Stage 2 Complaints 2022-2023



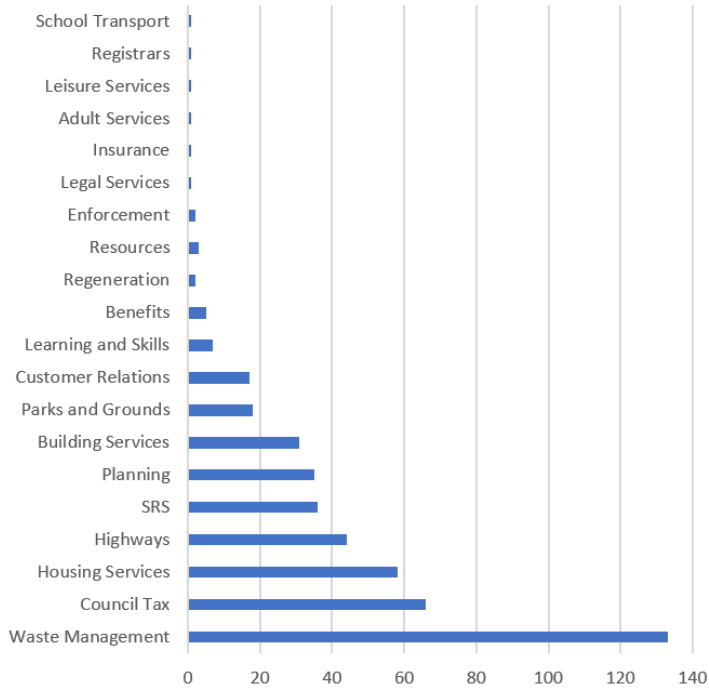
Complaint Resolution Stage



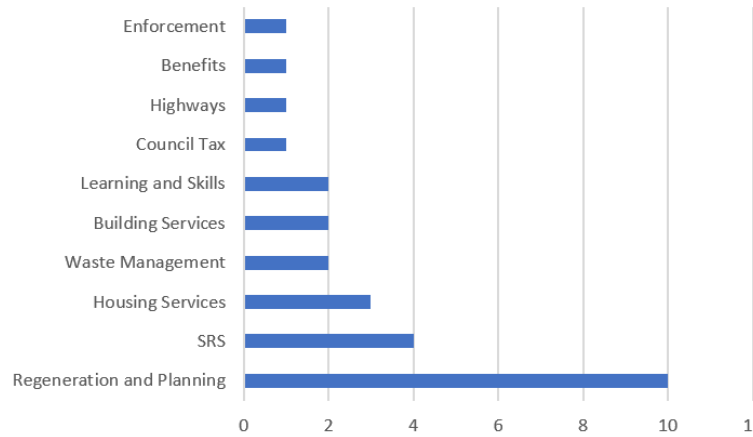
Cause of Complaint



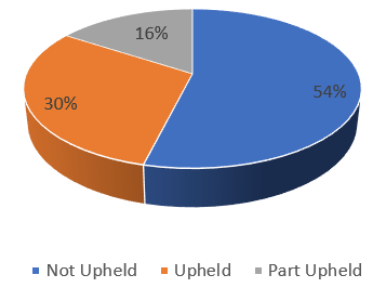
Stage 1 by Service Area



Stage 2 by Service Area



Outcome



Vale of Glamorgan Council – Corporate Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 2022/23

Executive Summary

This is the ninth annual corporate complaints and compliments report under the current policy. This report details all formally recorded complaints investigated through the Corporate Concerns and Complaints Policy between 01 April 2022 and 31 March 2023.

Social Services complaints are investigated under a different policy and are reported separately.

A summary of complaints raised with the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW), Welsh Language Commissioner and Social Services is provided for completeness and context.

The format of this report has been amended so that most tables and charts of statistical data have been included in appendices to make the report commentary shorter and easier to access. In addition, performance for the Place directorate is being reported separately for the first time, having previously been included within Corporate Resources directorate figures.

- **The long-term trend of increasing numbers of complaints continues.** The 495 complaints received in 2022/23 represents the second highest annual total recorded and 137 more than 2021/22.
- **Environment & Housing** directorate generated the highest number of complaints at 330, with **Waste Management receiving 25% of all complaints** made to the Council.
- **115 Compliments** were recorded with **Environment & Housing** directorate receiving the majority (excluding Social Services) at 105.
- **Responsiveness is decreasing** – the percentage of investigations **completed within timescales decreased to 59% from 61%** in 2021/22 and 64% in 2020/21. Moving to a new software application in August 2022 may have impacted on 2022/23 performance.
- **Most complaints are resolved at Stage 1** – only 5.5% of complaints are escalated to Stage 2
- **Recording of the Cause and Lessons Learned from complaints has improved** with 100% recorded since complaints administration moved to the new GovService software application in August 2022. The main cause of complaints is “Service Standards Not Met” representing 59% of reasons recorded.

- Research undertaken with complainants indicates that **improving the frequency and quality of communication** during investigations as the best way of **providing a more positive experience for residents**.
- Services provided **14 examples of how services have been improved** as a result of lessons learned from complaint investigations.
- **Complaints are meeting the requirements of statutory bodies** – Complaints made to the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) reduced to 49 (2021/22: 61) or 9.9% of total complaints received. None were investigated, although 15 (3%) were resolved through the Early Resolution process. The Welsh Language Commissioner investigated 3 complaints and upheld 2 during the year.
- The **Unacceptable Actions by Citizens Policy** was not applied to any resident during the year.

Activities undertaken to improve complaint handling, administration and reporting:

- PSOW training provided to frontline staff on recognising and receiving complaints.
- PSOW training provided to managers on principles of good investigations.
- Complaint recording and administration has been transferred to GovService application. New functionality has been developed, including automated email messaging for complainants, automated notifications to complaint owners and investigators to assist with management.
- A new Complaint Form launched for residents accessible on the council website.
- A research pilot has been undertaken to obtain direct feedback from complainants and insight about their experience of making a complaint.
- Examples of how services have been improved as a result of lessons learned from complaints have been collated and shared as examples of good practice.

Performance Summary

The council has undertaken a **research pilot** with the objective of providing qualitative **insight into the resident experience** of accessing the complaints process. (Appendix A: Summary Report)

Although 95 complainants were contacted, response rates were very low and only 3 interviews were undertaken.

Based on this small number of responses, the **recommendations to make the resident experience more positive centred around improving communications** while investigations were being undertaken.

Services across all 5 directorates provided a total of **14 examples of service improvements** (Appendix B) being made as a result of learning from complaint investigations. Common themes include:

- Improving Communications
- Responding within time scales
- Reinforcing adherence to policy and procedures

Social Services provided the highest number of examples 9, followed by Environment & Housing with 2 examples.

Total number of **complaints received increased from 358 to 495**, reflecting the long-term trend of increasing numbers for Stage 1 and Stage 2.

Although this is a significant year on year increase it should be noted that complaint volumes fell dramatically during the previous 2 years, impacted by the Corona Virus pandemic, and that **fewer complaints were received for 2022/23 than during the last reporting period unaffected by the pandemic (2019/20) when complaints totalled 559**.

While the number of overall complaints is increasing the **number escalated to Stage 2 has fallen to 5.5%** (27), compared to 10.3% (37) in 2021/22.

All directorates saw an increase in complaints during the year, **Environment and Housing continues to drive the highest volume** of complaints, with numbers **increasing from 274 in 2021/22 to 343** (Stage 1: 330, Stage 2:13) during 2022/23. However, this represents a **reduction in the overall share of complaints for the whole Council** from 76.5% in 2021/22 to **69.3%** (2020/21: 80%).

The **Waste Management** service handled the highest number of complaints at 128 representing 46.7% of the directorate total and **25.9% of the total for the Council**.

The **Corporate Resources** directorate reported **94 Stage 1 and 2 Stage 2** complaints, an increase of 13 on 2021/22 (81). When the 2022/23 volume of **46** complaints (Stage 1: 36, Stage 2: 10) is included **for the Place** directorate the actual increase is 58 or 71.6%.

Learning & Skills remains the directorate with the **fewest complaints** at 8 Stage 1 and 2 Stage 2, although this is still a significant percentage increase of 233% on the 2021/22 figure of 3.

Complaint Outcomes (Appendix C)

94.5% of all complaints were resolved at Stage 1, a further improvement on the previous year's performance of 89.7%. Place directorate recorded the highest proportion escalated to Stage 2 at 21.7%

Overall, only **45.3% of complaints were upheld either in full or part**. The Place directorate upheld the lowest number of complaints at 25.6% and Resources the highest at 63.2%.

Responsiveness (Appendix C)

There is a significant challenge for the Council as a whole in meeting response times for Stage 1 complaints. During 2022/23 the percentage of **Stage 1 complaints resolved within the 10-working day target fell to 59.2%**. Some of this fall off in performance may be as a result of colleagues learning how to use the new GovService software application to manage complaints, however it also reflects a trend of declining performance in this area.

Since transferring the complaints process to the GovService application in August 2022, colleagues undertaking investigations benefit from **receiving email notifications when a new complaint is received** for their team and **a reminder is sent 2 days before the due date**. In addition, new functionality has been added that allows colleagues to **"pause the clock"** when waiting for the complainant to provide information to allow the investigation to proceed. It is expected that these features will help colleagues to manage complaints more effectively and help ensure complaints are investigated within agreed service standards.

100% of Stage 2 complaints received were investigated within the 20-working day target.

Place directorate achieved the highest percentage of Stage 1 and 2 cases completed within target at 86%.

What is causing complaints? (Appendix C)

Failing to meet service standards remains the most common reason for residents to make a complaint, **accounting for 41% of the total and 58.9% of only those complaints where a cause has been recorded** (70.8% have a recorded cause). This significantly exceeds the next most common cause of Policy or Process Not Followed at 10.6%. **Allegations of discrimination accounted for 0.5%** of all complaints (2 cases).

Learning Outcomes

The percentage of complaints with **no learning outcome recorded has reduced significantly to 35.5%** compared to 88.5% in 2021/22 and is the lowest percentage recorded in the past 5 years.

Learning & Skills recorded the lowest percentage of complaints closed with no learning outcome at 14.3%.

Staff Training was the most popular outcome at 25% followed by Review Information at 18.4% and Review Service Standards at 12%.

It is difficult to comment on performance trends in this area because of the relatively low number of outcomes recorded in previous years.

Complaints made to statutory bodies.

The number of complaints made to the **Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) fell during the year to 49** compared to the historic high of 61 during 2021/22. No complaints were taken into investigation during the period although **15 were resolved through the Early Resolution** process.

Service Area Complaint Handling (11), Housing Services (11) and Planning & Building Control (8) continue to drive the highest volume of PSOW complaints.

During the period **3** Complaints were investigated by the **Welsh Language Commissioner** of which **2 were upheld**, relating to the provision of Welsh Language Birth Certificate and a delayed response to an email in Welsh.

Public Services Ombudsman Complaints, Welsh Language Complaints and Social Services Complaints

Public Services Ombudsman Complaints

49 (61 in 2020/21) complaints in respect of the Council were received by the PSOW during 2022/23, which is a decrease of **12** on the previous year.

Vale of Glamorgan Council	Complaints Received	% share
Adult Social Services	2	4%
Benefits Administration	1	2%
Children's Social Services	6	12%
Community Facilities, Recreation and Leisure	1	2%
Complaints Handling	11	22%
Covid19	0	0%
Education	0	0%
Environment and Environmental Health	2	4%
Finance and Taxation	1	2%
Housing	11	22%
Licensing	1	2%
Planning and Building Control	8	16%
Roads and Transport	1	2%
Various Other	4	8%
Total	49	

Vale of Glamorgan Council		% Share
Out of Jurisdiction	4	8%
Premature	15	28%
Other cases closed after initial consideration	19	36%
Early Resolution/ voluntary settlement*	15	28%
Discontinued	0	0%
Other Reports - Not Upheld	0	0%
Other Reports Upheld*	0	0%
Public Interest Reports*	0	0%
Special Interest Reports*	0	0%
Total	53	

There were no complaints taken into investigation during 2022/23, however 15 complaints were resolved through the Early Resolution process.

Complaint Handling (11), Housing Services (11) and Planning & Building Control (8) continue to drive the highest volume of PSOW complaints.

Ombudsman Complaints	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Adult Social Services	2	2	3	0
Benefits Administration	1	2	1	1
Children's Social Services	6	5	3	2
Community Facilities, Recreation and Leisure	1	2	0	0
Complaints Handling	11	10	5	4
Covid19	0	1	0	0
Education	0	2	1	1
Environment and Environmental Health	2	4	3	2
Finance and Taxation	1	1	2	1
Housing	11	14	7	7
Licensing	1	1	0	0
Planning and Building Control	8	13	3	6
Roads and Transport	1	3	6	3
Various Other	4	1	4	3
Total	49	61	38	30

Welsh Language Complaints - April 2022 to March 2023 (Appendix D)

During the period **3** Complaints were investigated by the **Welsh Language Commissioner** of which **2 were upheld**, relating to the provision of Welsh Language Birth Certificate and a delayed response to an email in Welsh.

5 complaints relating to use of Welsh language were also received directly from members of the public, with 3 of these objecting to receiving Welsh language content.

Date	Channel	Subject
29/06/22	Email	Welsh language on school sign
17/10/22	Portal	Not happy to receive correspondence in Welsh
18/10/22	Internal	Welsh content in Lifecycle documents
23/10/22	Email	Not happy that website is available in Welsh
27/10/22	Internal	Correspondence and documents not just in Welsh

Social Service Complaints

Social Service representations and complaints are dealt with under the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014 and the Representations Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014.

As of 31st of March 2023, 51 complaints were received which is slightly higher than in the previous year where a total of 50 were received. Out of the 51 complaints received, 20 were for Adult Services, 29 were for Children and Young People Services and 2 related to the Resource Management and Safeguarding Division.

Out of the 51 Complaints, 3 were investigated directly as a Stage 2 Investigation after the investigation through the Stage 1 process did not yield a satisfactory outcome for the complainant. 52.9% of these complaints were resolved within the designated timescales. During this period 8 complaints were referred onto the Ombudsman.

The table shown below provides a full breakdown of all enquiries and complaints received during 2022/2023:

Service Division	Enquiries	Complaints Stage 1	Complaints Stage 2	PSOW	Responded to in Timescales	Total Complaints and Enquiries Received
Adult Services	12	20	2	0	11	32
Children and Young People Services	29	29	1	3	12	58
Resource Management & Safeguarding	6	2	0	0	2	8

During 2022/2023 the highest number of Stage 1 complaints received by type of complaint were in relation to the quality/level of service (19) followed by a lack of communication (11) and a failure to listen (8). We also received complaints regarding timescale to respond (7), the availability of services (7) and promises not kept (7). There were also 24 complaints received for other reasons.

The table below provides a breakdown of the nature of complaints by Division.

Type of Complaint	Adult Services	Children and Young People Services	Resource Management and Safeguarding	Total Complaints by Nature of Complaint
Quality/level of service	9	10	0	19
Communication	7	4	0	11
Failure to listen	3	5	0	8
Unhappy with timescales	3	4	0	7

Availability of services	3	4	0	7
Promises not kept	4	3	0	7
Other	14	10	1	24

1-Please note there may be more than one reason a complaint is received. For example, one complaint was related to a communication, the quality of services provided and also charges for services.

Lessons learned from Social Services complaints investigations include:

1. The importance of screening complaints and deciding if we can progress them through our Complaints process and informing the complainants of our decision in a timely manner.
2. The Importance of recording more specific data about complaints and enquiries to give a more detailed understanding of areas for improvement.
3. The need to streamline the reporting of compliments and complaints and encourage the sharing of positive stories.
4. To continue to support teams by holding regular meetings with managers to ensure timely and effective communication with those using our services
5. The importance that teams and individual workers to identify their contact emails, telephone numbers to support appropriate communication with service users.
6. The importance of Improving communication within the Complaints Team by holding regular meetings and having effective handover of complaints in team members absence.

Customer Research (Appendix A)

The Council is keen to understand residents experience when raising a complaint to ensure that their needs are being met and committed to undertake research interviews with complainants to gather their views and opinions.

During October and November 2023 the undertook a pilot research project focussed its first direct gaining qualitative data about the resident experience of the corporate complaints process. The aim was to explore resident views on 6 key performance areas.

- Channel used to make their complaint.
- How easy it is to access the policy.
- Communication during the process.
- The timescales for completing the investigation.
- Satisfaction with the complaint outcome.
- Overall Experience.

A total 95 residents who had recent experience of using the Corporate Complaints Policy were contacted to ask them to participate in research interviews.

The objective was to complete 5 interviews per complaint outcome (Upheld, Part Upheld and Not Upheld). However only 7 residents responded positively to the request to participate, despite follow up telephone calls being made to encourage participation.

Due to issues with scheduling interviews, only 3 research interviews were completed. The participants were aged between 50 and 70 years old and comprised of 2 males and 1 female. One participant had a disability as defined under the Equalities Act 2010 and none were Welsh speakers.

2 participants reported their complaint by telephone and 1 using the online form.

Research Findings Summary

All participants reported that they had made several calls to the Council to attempt to resolve their issues before raising a Stage 1 complaint.

The decision regarding how to make a complaint appears to have been based on the level of “digital confidence” of the resident. One participant who chose to complain by telephone noting that they are “....*not the world’s most tech savvy character*”.

2 participants were aware that complaints could be made online but only 1 chose to do so.

Responses received regarding **communication** during the complaints process were generally positive.

“No chasing required, contact was sufficient throughout”

“Council updates were very effective”

However, one participant noted that they had to proactively chase up a response to their complaint and also that correspondence did not reflect the choice they expressed.

“Information was received via follow up calls made as no official responses were received”

“I requested responses via email – I was told a letter had been sent, but not received”

“a letter was hand delivered following that”

The majority of participants were happy with the **timescales** in resolving their complaint.

“As soon as it was a formal complaint, the wheels of industry were like lighting”

Encouragingly, 2 of the 3 participants reported that they are satisfied with the outcomes of their complaints and have seen an improvement to services since reporting.

“Yes, happy with the outcome of the complaint. Bin was replaced immediately, no further issues of damage, crew now collate all bags within one bin once collected – very happy!”

“It was addressed and unbelievably, everything has worked perfectly since”

The third participant reported that there was a delay in receiving an improved service but confirmed that they had seen an improvement more recently.

“Green bags have been collected as expected over the last 2 weeks. This was meant to be monitored but still missed regularly during the complaint”

When asked how the Council could improve the resident experience of the complaints process, responses focussed on improving communications.

“Receiving emails within timescales would be an improvement”

“Address the complaint quickly and keep the customer in the loop”

“Keeping the customer in the loop is key to customer satisfaction”

Although feedback has been received from a small number of residents, this pilot has demonstrated the value in undertaking research as a way of identifying opportunities to improve the complaints process and services.

Future work will focus on how to encourage greater participation from complainants, the capacity required to increase the frequency of research activity and how to bring other data sets together to give a more complete insight into the overall resident experience of Council services.

Learning from Complaints (Appendix B)

Previous reports have reported on outcome categories as a way of demonstrating what lessons have been learned by the Council and individual services from investigating complaints. Key learning Points are categorised as:

- Review & Amend Systems
- Review & Revise Information / Communication
- Review & Revise Policies / Procedures
- Review Service Standards
- Staff Training & Development
- No Learning

While this data provided useful statistical insight, it does not provide examples of the improvement within services that will be experienced by residents.

Services were asked to provide examples of where services had been improved as a result dealing with a specific complaint or series of complaints.

In total 14 examples were provided, detailing nature of complaint, how the service was improved and how the impact of the change is being monitored.

Directorate	Service	Examples
Environment & Housing	Enforcement	1
Environment & Housing	Transport	1
Learning & Skills	Additional learning Needs	1
Place	Planning	1
Resources	Council Tax	1
Social Services	Children & Young Peoples Service	5
Social Services	General	4

The majority of service changes focus on improved communications and response times.

Example 1 – Environment & Housing

Complaint - Insufficient information being available to parents regarding school bus catchment areas.

Response - Amended bus pass purchaser form and the school and college transport policy to advise how the council defines “the nearest available school”. All council documents relating to this are being updated with this information to ensure that parents have access to all the appropriate information before making a bus pass application.

Example 2 – Learning and Skills

Complaint – Unable to obtain information and to secure educational placement for child and poor communication from the Council.

Response – Procedures have been improved to ensure that formal responses are sent to parents.

Example 3 – Resources

Complaint – Complaints about long wait times to get through to Council Tax team by telephone.

Response – Implemented new telephone platform with self service opportunities for residents to reduce numbers of calls queuing and average wait time.

Example 4 – Social Services

Complaint – Processes and Policies are not being followed.

Response – A newly appointed policy officer has begun to review all policies across both adult and children services. Process maps are also being designed to support practitioners.

Further Work

Services will be canvassed for examples of service improvements on a quarterly basis.

Accessibility and Equality Survey

An online Equality Survey is available for members of the public to complete following the submission of the online complaints form. As of the date of this report **26** responses have been received (**51** in 2021/22). This form is now available on Granicus, it is sent automatically when a complaint is submitted.

It is not possible to draw any conclusions regarding the accessibility of the complaints process based on this very small sample size.

Of those who provided data, 46% were male, 54% were female. The following age range completed the online form (2 people did not provide the information):

18 – 25 - 2 people

26 to 35 - 0 people

36 to 45 – 3 people

46 to 55 - 6 people

56 to 65 years – 5 people

66 to 75 – 7 people

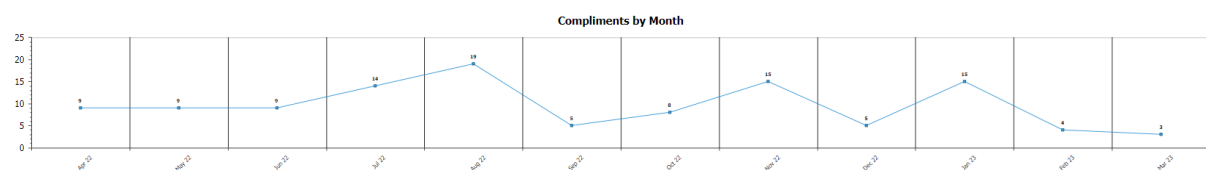
75+ - 3 people

80.5% of the complainants were aged 46 or over. Only 2 complaints were received from customers between 18 and 25, despite the ability to record Corporate Complaints online. **46%** of the complaints were from customers whose day-to-day activities were limited by some form of disability. We anticipate a higher completion rate for the next annual report due to the functionality of the Granicus system.

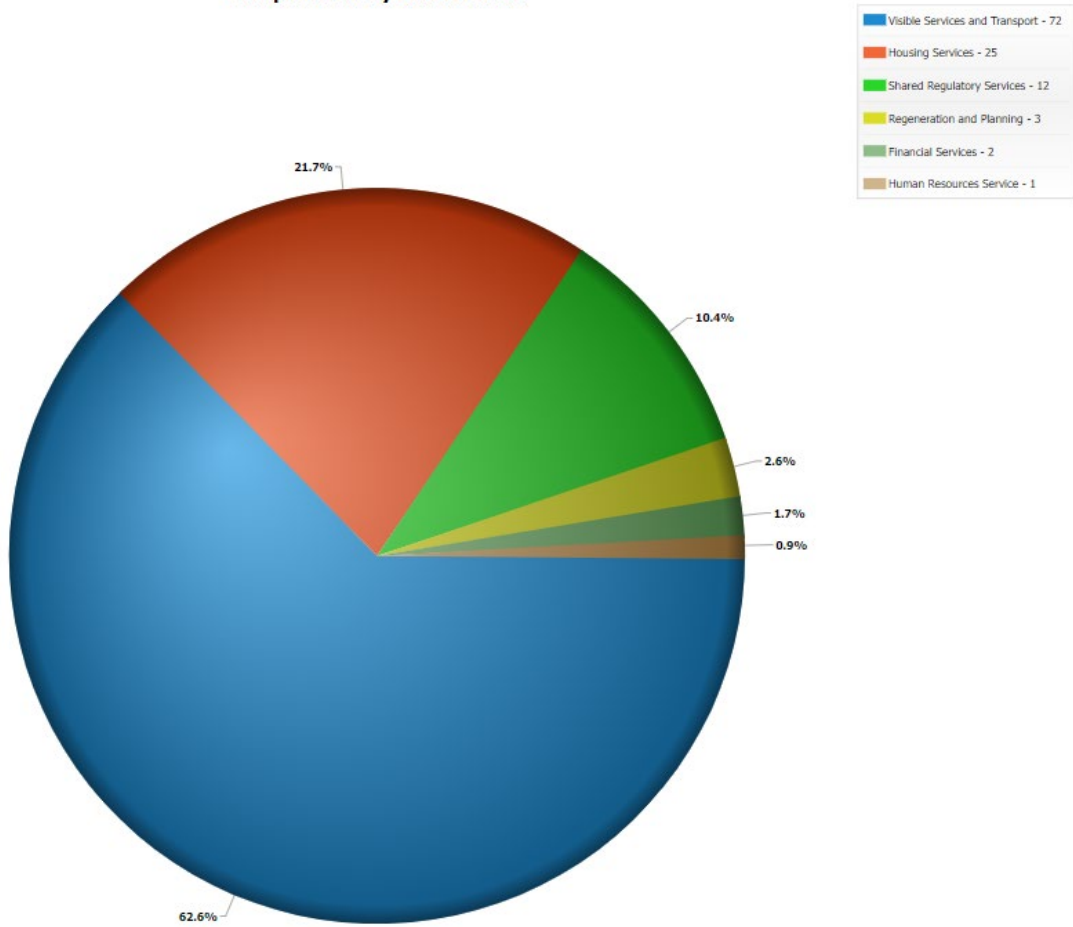
Compliments

The council received a total of **115 compliments** during the reporting period. The majority of compliments were recorded for **Environment & Housing at 109**, with 72 for Neighbourhood Services, 25 for Housing and 12 for Shared Regulatory Services. 3 compliments were received for Corporate Resources and 1 for Place.

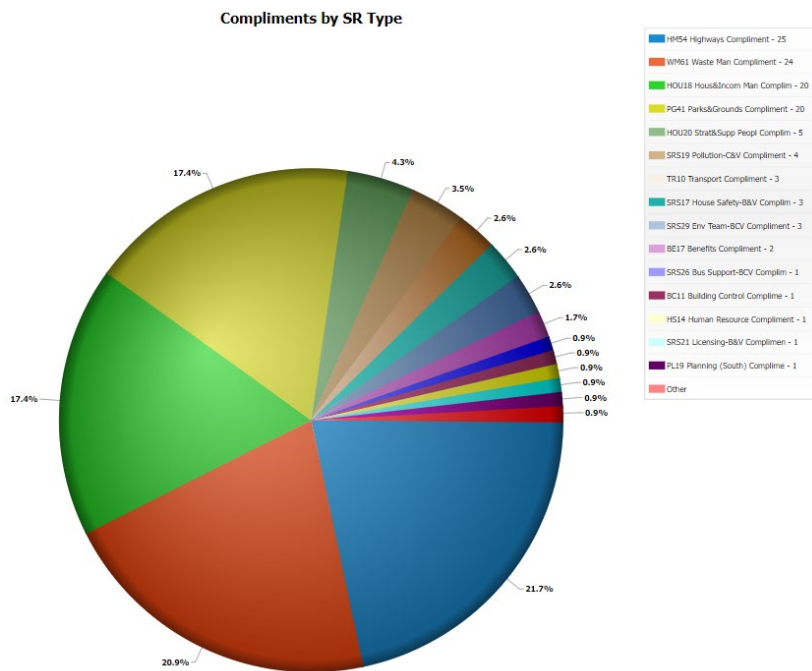
Compliments April 2022 to March 2023



Compliments by Service Area



Compliments by Service Request Type



Areas for future work

1. Develop user research approach to engage more complainants and develop insights that will inform improvements to the complaints policy and process.
2. Collate examples of service improvements made as a result of lessons learned from complaint investigations on a more frequent basis and share as examples of best practice.
3. Continue to work with services to improve the colleague experience of administrating and investigating complaints.
4. Use data from complaint handling and other data sets, such as customer satisfaction survey results, to develop improved insight into the resident experience of accessing council services.
5. Work with the digital service to develop real time reporting of complaints for service managers so that they have the information needed to manage the complaint investigation process and identify opportunities for service improvement.

Appendix A - User Research - Review of Vale of Glamorgan Complaints Process

November 2023

Research Proposal

A request was made by Customer Relations, to complete a User Research exercise, with the aim to gather thoughts and opinions from service users, on their experience in raising a complaint with the Vale of Glamorgan Council. A short window of opportunity was proposed to complete the exercise with an initial deadline for outcomes, of 13th October 2023. This was further extended until 21st November 2023.

Upon receipt of this information, the aim was to gain knowledge of user behaviours and expectations of the complaints process to inform any future service re-design activities (and support document for report?)

Service user groups have been identified, as anyone who has recently made a complaint within the last 3 months, that has been resolved.

Complaints Policy Overview

The complaints policy for the Vale of Glamorgan Council, follows guidelines and timescales set by the Ombudsman. This Policy applies to members of the public receiving or seeking a service from the Vale of Glamorgan Council, excluding Social Services.

Members of the public can contact the Vale of Glamorgan council to make a complaint, via the following channels:

- Online via Vale of Glamorgan website
- By Phone
- By Email
- In person
- In writing

Research Activities

The research will focus on the overall experience of the process, with consideration given to the following:

- Chosen channel
- Ease of Access
- Communication
- Timescales
- Complaint Outcome
- Overall Experience

The following activities were identified to support the aims of the research:

121	Number of Users	Engagement Method	Output
First Volunteer Recruitment	57 complainants	An email will be sent to all those who have made a complaint within the last 3 months (14.09.23)	3 – 5 volunteers to be interviewed, per outcome status*
Second Volunteer Recruitment	38 complainants	An email will be sent to all those who have made a complaint within the last 3 months (27.09.23)	3 – 5 volunteers to be interviewed, per outcome status*
Interviews	3 - 5 per status*	Phone call or Teams meeting (to be recorded with consent, where possible)	Record of responses to questions asked
Review and summary of responses	All volunteers	N/A	Summary of responses with a view to highlight any flaws throughout the process, if applicable

The outcome or status* of complaints can be any of the following:

- Upheld
- Partially upheld
- Not Upheld

Recruitment of Volunteers

In order to recruit a selection of volunteers to take part on the project, an email was sent to a list of 67 people, who had recently raised a complaint with the council. This would have included complaints made via any channel and with any outcome status.

Following an initial email sent, a total of seven people responded with an expression of interest to take part in the research. We reached out again to those seven people, providing some more specific information about the research and what they could expect from taking part. Following this, a total of two people responded with an interest and agreement to take part in the research.

Following the initial recruitment activities, we were able to interview one volunteer. To gain true insight in user requirements, it was identified that a further round of recruitment was necessary, not only to ensure we reach a wider representation of service users, but also to enrich the quality of data. A further eight volunteers were recruited during the extension period, with two interviews completed.

Research Summary

Demographic Data

The group of volunteers that took part in this project were between the age of 50 and 75. Both male and female service users were represented, with one volunteer having a disability, as defined under the Equalities Act 2010. None of the three volunteers were Welsh speaking.

Findings

Digital Confidence

The complaints process is offered to users via a range of channels. Therefore, it is useful to establish the level of confidence amongst service users, as part of the research.

In relation to the level of confidence in using digital devices, one volunteer classed themselves as *"...not the world's most tech savvy character"* and therefore would not be confident in attempting to use the online form to make a complaint in the future. Another volunteer advised that they were *"Confident in using computers, but still found it difficult to find the complaints form online."*

Channel Choice

Of the three volunteers, two reported their complaint over the phone, and one using the online form via the Vale of Glamorgan council.

All three volunteers reported that they made a Stage 1 complaint, following several phone calls to the contact centre, in relation to the issue. Two of the three volunteers were aware that you could register a formal complaint online, with only one of them using the online form and the other registering the complaint whilst on the phone.

Communication

There were varied opinions on the communication received throughout the process of the Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints process.

The majority of responses were positive when asking about their level of satisfaction around the communication of progress throughout the process:

"No chasing required, contact was sufficient throughout"

"Council updates were very effective"

"Was not a huge box to fill in but was adequate to complete details of the complaint"

There were some negative comments in relation to communication, that resulted in the user having to make chase up a response to their complaint. The volunteer explained that this was:

"...very frustrating"

"Information was received via follow up calls made as no official responses were received"

It was identified that there was some confusion during the process for one volunteer who had reported the complaint via the online form:

“I requested responses via email – I was told a letter had been sent, but not received”

“a letter was hand delivered following that”

Timescales

The level of satisfaction amongst volunteers in terms of timescales in resolving the complaint was also varied, but the majority were happy with the time taken to respond to their complaint, as well as the outcome received:

“As soon as it was a formal complaint, the wheels of industry were like lighting”

One volunteer explained that they were not happy with the time taken to respond to the complaint, and an outcome was yet to be received:

“Still an outstanding complaint – will likely forward to the Ombudsman”

Outcomes

Two of the three volunteers were happy with the outcome of their complaint, and have seen an improvement to service provision since reporting the complaint:

“Yes, happy with the outcome of the complaint. Bin was replaced immediately, no further issues of damage, crew now collate all bags within one bin once collected – very happy!”

“It was addressed and unbelievably, everything has worked perfectly since”

There was an initial delay for one volunteer in receiving an improvement to service provision, since raising a complaint but has confirmed that they have seen an improvement more recently, even though the complaint is still outstanding:

“Green bags have been collected as expected over the last 2 weeks. This was meant to be monitored but still missed regularly during the complaint”

Lessons Learned

Recruitment

- We initially had a short window of opportunity to complete some user research, thus limiting our ability to reach the number of volunteers. We realised that having a larger number of volunteers, would offer more diverse range of responses and provide a better representation of service users. In this instance, it was decided that it would be beneficial to extend the research phase, to allow for a further round of recruitment and interviews to be completed.

For any future user research projects, it will be prudent to ensure that realistic timescales are set to allow for any potential delays in recruiting and interviewing, a suitable number of volunteers.

- Recruitment proved challenging, when trying to gain initial permission from service users to contact them specifically about the project, in line with GDPR. Therefore, to gain permission to email potential volunteers about any future user reach activities, proactively gaining

permission following all complaints raised, would provide an opportunity to reach out on a regular basis for feedback.

User Research Road Map

- With the recent difficulties in recruitment of volunteers in mind, and the aim to consistently review the needs and requirements of service users, having a regular schedule of user research activities throughout the year that involves direct feedback between the council and its service users, would offer more wealthy data in which to base any future service re-design.

Suggestions for Improvement

There were a few suggestions for improving the communication with users, that may be useful to consider going forward:

“Receiving emails within timescales would be an improvement”

“Address the complaint quickly and keep the customer in the loop”

“Keeping the customer in the loop is key to customer satisfaction”

Recommendations

- It is recommended that there is consistency in the way the Council responds to complainants. If a letter is required, it would be beneficial to send an additional email to widen the opportunity for users to receive their response within the required timescales.
- Review the process in which to obtain consent from users to take part in future user research activities
- Review the road map for User Research projects, in order to plan and accommodate recruitment activities to include a wider range of service users

Appendix B – Learning from Complaints. Service Improvement Examples

Name of Service / Process	Details of Complaint	How the service has been improved	How impact is being monitored.
Children and Young Peoples Service	Lack of timely communication with social worker / Team Managers.	The Quality Assurance team, which is a newly formed team will attend regular team meetings across both children and adult services where staff will be reminded on the importance of timely communication.	The complaints officer now meets weekly with Operational managers of all teams to ensure that phone calls are responded to in a timely manner.
Children and Young Peoples Service	Lack of process and policies being followed.	A newly appointed policy officer has begun to review all policies across both adult and children services. Process maps are also being designed to support practitioners.	Through attending team meetings and ensuring that all staff are aware of how to access Policy and Procedures.
Complaints Handover in team absences / covering holidays	Complaints not being completed in timescales.	The complaint's officer now meets with the Operational Managers on a weekly basis in order to avoid drift and delay with responding to complaints.	A newly appointed Quality Assurance Manager ensures oversight of complaints in Complaints officer's absence. The QA team is in the process of expanding which will include an admin officer to support this function.
Stage 2 Complaint Timescales	Complaints not being completed within regulatory timescale.	Updates required at day 15 of the investigation and to offer support to the Investigating officer to ensure that we are adhering to regulatory timescales.	Complaints Officer has overview of the investigation process and requests regular updates from the Investigator.
Lack of stage 2 Investigators (IIO's)	Delay in commencing Stage 2 Investigation.	Raised in AWCOG (All Wales Complaints Team Group) Forum and liaised with Other Local authorities to expand list of available IIO'S.	The Complaints Officer attends monthly AWCOG meeting for updates of any new / or available IIO's to add to list.
Children and Young Peoples Service	Complaint about social workers lack of knowledge of support available for families.	By holding information sessions with the intake team with all early help and prevention services to ensure that they are aware of the support that is available. families.	The Quality Assurance Team are currently reviewing the support available including the induction staff receive.

Name of Service / Process	Details of Complaint	How the service has been improved	How impact is being monitored.
Children and Young Peoples Service	Inaccuracies of information recorded.	By reviewing and implementing the Recording policy to ensure records are factually correct and contain the necessary information. Managers will ensure this is adhered to through supervision with social workers / SCO's.	As part of the Quality Assurance Framework monthly audits will be undertaken across teams to ensure practice standards are upheld.
Children and Young Peoples Service	Lack of person-centred planning and professionalism.	A strength-based model is currently being implemented across children's services to support good practice based on building and sustaining good relationships with families.	Audits will be undertaken in line with the development of the QA framework.
Children and Young Peoples Service & Adult Social Services	Complaints escalating to stage 2.	An online complaints training module is now available to all staff via the Online learning platform. This will be promoted by the Quality Assurance team within individual team meetings.	Uptake and use of the training module to be monitored across teams.
Enforcement	Attitude of officers	Not upheld but written apologies provided to the complainant	Checking of body-cam footage as required and regular reminders to officers about acting professionally at all times
Transport	School bus catchment	Not upheld but following ombudsman report, bus pass purchaser form amended plus school and college transport policy is being amended to advise what the council defines as the nearest available school and all council documents relating to this will be updated with this information plus link to councils "check" function on its website will be provided in the policy document to enable checks to be made on what individual school is defined as their catchment.	Amendments made to webpage and form as necessary. Confirmed by checking webpages. Impact being monitored by seeing if we get further complaints around this issue.

Name of Service / Process	Details of Complaint	How the service has been improved	How impact is being monitored.
Additional Learning Needs	Complaint received via the Ombudsman about the service provided by the Council's Additional Learning Needs team, when attempting to obtain information and to secure an educational placement for a child. They also complained about communication and in particular that the Council had not provided a response to her complaint.	Tighten our process for responding more formally in future.	Monitoring complaint response times.
Planning	Complaint via Ombudsman in relation to planning issues. Complainant received a letter explaining that his concerns were not treated as a corporate complaint as the Council does not investigate a 'properly made' decision.	Advise staff not to inform service users that their complaints have not been treated as a corporate complaint when it has been investigated under that process. Should the investigation find that the decision was properly made, this would be the complaint response.	Template for responses amended.

Name of Service / Process	Details of Complaint	How the service has been improved	How impact is being monitored.
Council Tax	Multiple complaints from residents about the amount of answer delay when contacting the Council Tax department.	New telephony service implemented which allows residents to complete enquiries through self-service options and promotes take up of online services by offering SMS text links to digital services available on the council's website.	Monitoring average answer delay and maximum answer delay for Council Tax telephone service.

Appendix C - Statistical Performance

Complaints Resolved at Stage 1

Directorate	Percentage (%) Resolved at Stage 1								
	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15
Learning and Skills	80	66.7	66.7	72.7	80	85.7	90.9	77.8	91.3
Resources	97.9	84	90.8	91.8	86.6	81.4	77.5	80.3	96.9
Environment And Housing	96.2	91.6	90.4	94.1	94.5	88.1	90.2	90.7	87.7
Place	78.3	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total	94.5	89.7	90.2	93.4	93.1	86.4	87.7	88.3	91.3

Stage 1 and Stage 2 Complaints Outcome

Directorate	Not Upheld (%)	Upheld (%)	Part Upheld (%)
Learning & Skills			
2022/23	55.6	22.2	22.2
2021/22	66.7	0	33.3
2020/21	66.7	0	33.3
2019/20	18.2	54.4	27.3
2018/19	60	0	40
2017/18	28.6	35.7	35.7
2016/17	54.5	27.3	18.2
2015/16	0	44.4	55.6
2014/15	31.7	34	32.7
Resources			
2022/23	36.8	40.8	22.4
2021/22	44.4	34.6	8.6
2020/21	32.3	38.5	15.4
2019/20	30.1	42.5	19.2
2018/19	57.4	22.1	11.8
2017/18	51.4	30	18.6
2016/17	56.3	26.3	17.5
2015/16	53.9	18.4	27.6
2014/15	23.7	15.3	61.1
Environment & Housing			
2022/23	56.6	29.6	13.9
2021/22	42.7	38	8
2020/21	35.2	38.1	15.6
2019/20	36.6	41.9	16.4
2018/19	36.0	44.7	12.4
2017/18	39.5	36.7	21.9
2016/17	32.7	46.7	18.6
2015/16	38.3	49	11.4
2014/15	37.4	49.7	9.8
Place			
2022/23	74.4	14	11.6
	Not Upheld (%)	Upheld (%)	Part Upheld (%)
Total (excluding Social Services)			
2022/23	54.7	29.9	15.4
2021/22	43.3	36.9	8.4
2020/21	34.9	37.9	16
2019/20	35.4	42.2	17.0
2018/19	39.7	40.4	12.6
2017/18	41.8	35	21.8
2016/17	38	41.8	18.6
2015/16	40.7	42.6	15.7
2014/15	31.7	34	32.7

Complaints Resolved within Target

Directorate	Resolved within target (%)								
	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19	2017/18	2016/17	2015/16	2014/15
Learning & Skills	33.3	100	66.7	81.8	80	71.4	90.1	66.7	73
Resources	59.2	69.1	56.9	63	58.8	75.7	82.5	77.6	87
Environment & Housing	55.8	58	65.9	68.4	55.9	50.5	72.5	73.4	62
Place	86	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Council	59.2	60.9	64.2	68	56.5	56.8	75.1	74.2	73

Causes of Complaints - Learning and Skills

Year	Incorrect Info Provided (%)	Other (%)	Policy/ Procedure not Followed (%)	Service Standards not met (%)	Staff Behaviour (%)	Not Recorded (%)	Discrimination (%)
2022/23	14.3	0	0	57.1	14.3	14.3	0
2021/22	0	0	33.3	0	0	66.7	0
2020/21	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2019/20	8.3	0	0	0	8.3	83.3	0
2018/19	0	0	0	0	0	100	0
2017/18	13.6	0	13.6	18.2	18.2	36.4	0
2016/17	17.6	11.8	11.8	5.9	29.4	23.5	-
2015/16	12.5	0	18.8	18.8	12.5	37.5	-
2014/15	0	0	0	0	0	0	-

Causes of Complaints - Resources

Year	Incorrect Info Provided (%)	Other (%)	Policy/ Procedure not Followed (%)	Service Standards not met (%)	Staff Behaviour (%)	Not Recorded (%)	Discrimination (%)
2022/23	10	0	8.9	43.3	4.4	32.2	1.1
2021/22	2.4	0	7.1	5.9	7.1	77.6	0
2020/21	2.8	2.8	5.6	9.7	9.7	69.4	0
2019/20	6.4	6.4	9	10.3	7.7	60.3	0
2018/19	1.3	14.5	9.2	18.4	9.2	47.4	0
2017/18	12	12	13	20.7	18.5	22.8	1.1
2016/17	17.2	14.7	12.1	10.3	25.9	19.8	-
2015/16	10.6	11.7	9.6	12.8	16	39.4	-
2014/15	2	35.8	37.3	2.9	3.9	18.1	-

Causes of Complaints - Council

Year	Incorrect Info Provided (%)	Other (%)	Policy/ Procedure not Followed (%)	Service Standards not met (%)	Staff Behaviour (%)	Not Recorded (%)	Discrimination (%)
2022/23	9.9	0.7	10.6	41.3	7.8	29.2	0.5
2021/22	1.3	1.3	6.5	16.4	6.5	67.7	0.3
2020/21	3.1	3.9	8.1	18.4	5.3	61.3	0
2019/20	3.2	3.8	7	21	3.5	61.5	0
2018/19	3.9	8.8	3.9	11.4	6.6	67	0
2017/18	6.7	20.1	7.8	14.8	13.9	36.2	0.6
2016/17	8.4	10.3	5.6	7.1	12.8	55.9	-
2015/16	7.6	9.1	11.6	9.6	19.6	42.5	-
2014/15	4.4	21.4	21.9	3.4	4.4	44.4	-

Learning from Complaints - Learning and Skills

Year	No Learning (%)	Review Systems (%)	Review Information (%)	Review Procedures (%)	Review Service Standards (%)	Staff Training (%)
2022/23	14.3	14.3	42.9	14.3	0	14.3
2021/22	66.7	0	33.3	0	0	0
2020/21	0	0	0	0	0	0
2019/20	27.3	18.2	18.2	0	9.1	27.3
2018/19	60	40	0	0	0	0
2017/18	42.9	7.1	14.3	14.3	0	21.4
2016/17	54.5	9.1	27.3	9.1	0	0
2015/16	66.7	11.1	11.1	0	0	11.1
2014/15	66.7	0	16.7	0	0	16.7

Learning from Complaints - Resources

Year	No Learning (%)	Review Systems (%)	Review Information (%)	Review Procedures (%)	Review Service Standards (%)	Staff Training (%)
2022/23	34.5	4.6	11.5	2.3	12.6	34.5
2021/22	77.8	3.7	0	1.2	1.2	16
2020/21	67.7	3.1	4.6	1.5	3.1	20
2019/20	56.2	4.1	4.1	1.4	11	23.3
2018/19	73.5	0	2.9	1.5	10.3	11.8
2017/18	45.7	0	12.9	2.9	1.4	37.1
2016/17	60	6.3	12.5	5	2.5	13.8
2015/16	64.5	6.6	5.3	1.3	0	22.4
2014/15	33.6	2.3	55	2.3	0	6.9

Learning from Complaints – Environment and Housing

Year	No Learning (%)	Review Systems (%)	Review Information (%)	Review Procedures (%)	Review Service Standards (%)	Staff Training (%)
2022/23	36.2	4	20.7	5.8	12.7	20.7
2021/22	92	1.1	2.6	0.2	1.5	2.6
2020/21	90	1.9	4.1	0	2.2	1.9
2019/20	88.8	0	0.4	0.4	4.8	5.5
2018/19	64	2	3.5	0.3	19	11.2
2017/18	65.7	1	10	4.3	3.3	15.7
2016/17	42.2	2.9	7.2	2	25.8	19.9
2015/16	41	5.5	4.1	6.2	1.4	41.7
2014/15	39.3	8.6	10.4	2.5	1.2	38

Learning from Complaints – Place (separated from Resources reporting 2022/23)

Year	No Learning (%)	Review Systems (%)	Review Information (%)	Review Procedures (%)	Review Service Standards (%)	Staff Training (%)
2022/23	36.8	2.6	13.2	2.6	7.9	36.8
2021/22	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2020/21	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2019/20	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2018/19	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2017/18	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2016/17	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2015/16	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2014/15	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Learning from Complaints - Council

Year	No Learning (%)	Review Systems (%)	Review Information (%)	Review Procedures (%)	Review Service Standards (%)	Staff Training (%)
2022/23	35.5	4.2	18.4	4.9	12	25
2021/22	88.5	1.7	2.2	0.6	1.4	5.6
2020/21	85.8	2.1	4.1	0.3	2.4	5.3
2019/20	83.4	0.9	1.3	0.5	5.7	8.2
2018/19	65.6	2.1	3.3	0.5	17.3	11.2
2017/18	59.9	1	10.9	4.4	2.7	21.1
2016/17	46.1	3.8	8.8	2.8	20.4	18.1
2015/16	46.5	5.9	4.5	5.1	1.1	37
2014/15	37.3	5.7	30	2.3	0.7	24

Appendix D Welsh Language Complaints

Investigation	Department	Date received	Complaint
CS1036	Registrars	19/08/2022	Complainant (baby's father) did not receive a Welsh language birth certificate and stated he was not offered a Welsh birth certificate.
<p>Recording of the registration booking showed it was the mother who booked the appointment, confirming she was not a Welsh speaker. In line with Registration regulations (under General Record Office), Welsh appointments can only be offered if the customer says they speak Welsh. The birth certificate is evidence of the registration and not a separate entity. We don't 'produce' the birth certificate – we collate the information during a registration, which is then passed to the authority where the birth happened (there are not many in the Vale) to physically print the certificate on standard forms provided by GRO. All certificates in Wales are bilingual, there is no Welsh only option available.</p> <p>Detailed review of the Registration GRO regulations and guidelines prove that the Council acted lawfully and in line with the GRO regulations. Unfortunately, they do not correspond with Welsh Language Standards. The Registration team are aware of this and have raised the issue before. Due to legal ramifications, GRO regulations come first.</p> <p>We have completed the recommended actions as far as possible (for example, one action was to state Welsh language certificates are available. We cannot say this – as per GRO regulations).</p> <p>Welsh Language Commissioner has determined we failed to comply with Standard 42 and Standard 81.</p> <p>Standard 42: Any licence or certificate you produce must be produced in Welsh. Standard 81: You must promote any Welsh language service that you provide and advertise that service in Welsh.</p> <p>We have challenged this decision. This challenge is being treated as a challenge to apply Standard 42 to the Registration service at all, rather than the ruling itself.</p>			
CS1067	Learning and Skills – School Access	11/10/2022	English language options on dropdown menu on Welsh language school application form
<p>The Welsh language school admissions portal had English language options in the dropdown menu. School Access team corrected it quickly – the 'back end' of the portal doesn't change from year to year so they had assumed it was fully translated. 'Front end' is updated, reviewed and checked frequently due to term dates. The team updated their user end testing and checking procedures and carried out a full review to ensure no other translation issues.</p> <p>The evidence request and recommended actions were extensive and not entirely proportionate to the complaint – this was noted to the Welsh Language Commissioner. All recommended actions have been completed.</p>			

Welsh Language Commissioner has determined that we failed to comply with Standard 52 and 56, but that we did not fail to comply with Standard 55.

Standard 52: You must ensure that –

- (a) the text of each page of your website is available in Welsh,
 - (b) every Welsh language page on your website is fully functional, and
 - (c) the Welsh language is not treated less favourably than the English language on your website.
- Standard 55: If you have a Welsh language web page that corresponds to an English language web page, you must state clearly on the English language web page that the page is also available in Welsh, and you must provide a direct link to the Welsh page on the corresponding English page.

Standard 56: You must provide the interface and menus on every page of your website in Welsh.

CS1077	Shared Regulatory Services	11/11/2022	Welsh email was not responded to. Complainant believed there was a delay due to the email being in Welsh.
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SRS confirmed an email was received in an internal, rarely used account – they are confused as to how the customer knew of the address to email. There was a delay in seeing the email as it is not an account that is regularly monitored. This was the cause of the delay, not that it was in Welsh. The email consisted of a new issue/complaint from the customer. A response was sent in English as the customer’s ongoing complaints were being handled in English and the customer had not advised his preferred language was any different. Recommended actions have been given and we are working towards completion by 13/10/2023, including a widescale promotion of Welsh language standards.

Welsh Language Commissioner has determined that we failed to comply with Standard 1.

Standard 1: If you receive correspondence from a person in Welsh you must reply in Welsh (if an answer is required), unless the person has indicated that there is no need to reply in Welsh.

CS1105	Neighbourhood Services	20/01/2023	Customer requested correspondence is made in Welsh but had not received a response within 8 days of his email.
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Welsh Language Commissioner confirmed they would take no further action with this complaint as it was from the same person as complaint CS1077 and covers the same issue.

Neighbourhood Services confirmed the customer’s language choice had been updated but that no response was sent – the email did not contain the information/answers that Neighbourhood Services had requested so they treated it as a language preference only.




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Ask for: Communications

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Date: 17 August 2023

 Communications
@ombudsman.wales

Cllr. Lis Burnett
Vale of Glamorgan Council
By Email only: lburnett@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk

Annual Letter 2022/23

Dear Councillor Burnett

I am pleased to provide you with the Annual letter (2022/23) for Vale of Glamorgan Council which deals with complaints relating to maladministration and service failure, complaints relating to alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct for Councillors and the actions being taken to improve public services.

This letter coincides with my Annual Report – “[A year of change – a year of challenge](#)” – a sentiment which will no doubt resonate with public bodies across Wales. My office has seen another increase in the number of people asking for our help – up 3% overall compared to the previous year, and my office now receives double the number of cases we received a decade ago.

In the last year, I have met with public bodies across Wales – speaking about our casework, our recommendations, and our proactive powers. The current climate will continue to provide challenges for public services, but I am grateful for the positive and productive way in which local authorities continue to engage with my office.

1,020 complaints were referred to us regarding local authorities last year - a reduction of 11% compared to the previous year. During this period, we intervened in (upheld, settled or resolved at an early stage) 13% of local authority complaints.

We received fewer Code of Conduct complaints in 22/23 compared to the previous year, relating to both Principal Councils and Town and Community Councils. My role is such that I do not make final findings about breaches of the Code of Conduct. Instead, where investigations find the most serious concerns, these are referred to the Standards Committee of the relevant local authority, or the

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Adjudication Panel for Wales. In 2022/23, the Ombudsman made 12 such referrals – a welcome reduction from 20 last year.

Supporting improvement of public services

Despite the challenges of last year, we have pushed forward with our proactive improvement work and launched a new Service Quality process to ensure we deliver the standards we expect.

Last year, we began work on our second wider Own Initiative investigation – this time looking into carers assessments within local authorities. This investigation will take place throughout the coming year, and we look forward to sharing our findings with all local authorities – not just those involved in the investigation.

The Complaints Standards Authority (CSA) continued its work with public bodies in Wales last year, with more than 50 public bodies now operating our model policy. We've also now provided more than 400 training sessions since we started, with local authorities, in September 2020.

We continued our work to publish complaints statistics into a second year, with data now published twice a year. This data allows us to see information with greater context – for example, last year 12% of Vale of Glamorgan Council's complaints were referred to PSOW.

I would encourage Vale of Glamorgan Council, and specifically your Audit and Governance Committee, to use this data to better understand your performance on complaints and consider how well good complaints handling is embedded throughout the Authority.

Further to this letter can I ask that your Council takes the following actions:

- Present my Annual Letter to the Cabinet and to the Governance and Audit Committee at the next available opportunity and notify me of when these meetings will take place.
- Continue to engage with our Complaints Standards work, accessing training for your staff, fully implementing the model policy, and providing accurate and timely complaints data.
- Inform me of the outcome of the Council's considerations and proposed actions on the above matters at the earliest opportunity.

Yours sincerely,



Michelle Morris
Public Services Ombudsman

cc. Rob Thomas, Chief Executive, Vale of Glamorgan Council.
By Email only: DRThomas@valeofglamorgan.gov.uk



Factsheet

Appendix A - Complaints Received

Local Authority	Complaints Received	Received per 1000 residents
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	16	0.24
Bridgend County Borough Council	55	0.38
Caerphilly County Borough Council	49	0.28
Cardiff Council*	142	0.39
Carmarthenshire County Council	53	0.28
Ceredigion County Council	35	0.49
Conwy County Borough Council	31	0.27
Denbighshire County Council	32	0.33
Flintshire County Council	65	0.42
Cyngor Gwynedd	36	0.31
Isle of Anglesey County Council	25	0.36
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council	17	0.29
Monmouthshire County Council	23	0.25
Neath Port Talbot Council	39	0.27
Newport City Council	42	0.26
Pembrokeshire County Council	44	0.36
Powys County Council	38	0.29
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council**	54	0.23
Swansea Council	94	0.39
Torfaen County Borough Council	16	0.17
Vale of Glamorgan Council	49	0.37
Wrexham County Borough Council	65	0.48
Total	1020	0.33
* inc 9 Rent Smart Wales		
** inc 2 South Wales Parking Group		



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Appendix B - Received by Subject

Vale of Glamorgan Council	Complaints Received	% share
Adult Social Services	2	4%
Benefits Administration	1	2%
Children's Social Services	6	12%
Community Facilities, Recreation and Leisure	1	2%
Complaints Handling	11	22%
Covid19	0	0%
Education	0	0%
Environment and Environmental Health	2	4%
Finance and Taxation	1	2%
Housing	11	22%
Licensing	1	2%
Planning and Building Control	8	16%
Roads and Transport	1	2%
Various Other	4	8%
Total	49	

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Appendix C - Complaint Outcomes
(* denotes intervention)

Vale of Glamorgan Council		% Share
Out of Jurisdiction	4	8%
Premature	15	28%
Other cases closed after initial consideration	19	36%
Early Resolution/ voluntary settlement*	15	28%
Discontinued	0	0%
Other Reports - Not Upheld	0	0%
Other Reports Upheld*	0	0%
Public Interest Reports*	0	0%
Special Interest Reports*	0	0%
Total	53	

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Appendix D - Cases with PSOW Intervention

	No. of interventions	No. of closures	% of interventions
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	0	16	0%
Bridgend County Borough Council	5	57	9%
Caerphilly County Borough Council	6	52	12%
Cardiff Council	25	145	17%
Cardiff Council - Rent Smart Wales	1	9	11%
Carmarthenshire County Council	7	60	12%
Ceredigion County Council	13	44	30%
Conwy County Borough Council	5	35	14%
Denbighshire County Council	2	33	6%
Flintshire County Council	5	70	7%
Cyngor Gwynedd	5	33	15%
Isle of Anglesey County Council	5	25	20%
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council	1	18	6%
Monmouthshire County Council	1	22	5%
Neath Port Talbot Council	7	38	18%
Newport City Council	8	48	17%
Pembrokeshire County Council	3	45	7%
Powys County Council	8	44	18%
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council	2	54	4%
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council - South Wales Parking Group	0	2	0%
Swansea Council	10	99	10%
Torfaen County Borough Council	1	17	6%
Vale of Glamorgan Council	15	53	28%
Wrexham County Borough Council	6	67	9%
Total	141	1086	13%



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Appendix E - Code of Conduct Complaints

Vale of Glamorgan Council

Investigations	Decision not to investigate	2
	Discontinued	1
	No evidence of breach	0
	No action necessary	0
	Refer to Adjudication Panel	0
	Refer to Standards Committee	0
	Total	3

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Appendix F - Town/Community Council Code of Complaints

Town/Community Council	Decision not to investigate	Discontinued	No evidence of breach	No action necessary	Refer to Adjudication Panel	Refer to Standards Committee	Total
Barry Town Council	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Cowbridge with Llanblethian Town Council	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
St Athan Community Council	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sully and Lavernock Community Council	0	0	0	1	0	0	1

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Information Sheet

Appendix A shows the number of complaints received by PSOW for all Local Authorities in 2022/23. These complaints are contextualised by the population of each authority.

Appendix B shows the categorisation of each complaint received, and what proportion of received complaints represents for the Local Authority.

Appendix C shows outcomes of the complaints which PSOW closed for the Local Authority in 2022/23. This table shows both the volume, and the proportion that each outcome represents for the Local Authority.

Appendix D shows Intervention Rates for all Local Authorities in 2022/23. An intervention is categorised by either an upheld complaint (either public interest or non-public interest), an early resolution, or a voluntary settlement.

Appendix E shows the outcomes of Code Of Conduct complaints closed by PSOW related to Local Authority in 2022/23. This table shows both the volume, and the proportion that each outcome represents for the Local Authority.

Appendix F shows the outcomes of Code of Conduct complaints closed by PSOW related to Town and Community Councils in the Local Authority's area in 2022/23. This table shows both the volume, and the proportion that each outcome represents for each Town or Community Council.

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