

Council Complaints Policy Annual Report

2021-22

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Foreword

This is our Corporate Complaints Annual Report for 2021-22, a document that details the complaints and compliments received by the Council during the financial year.

2021-22 has brought new challenges, new ways of working and communicating as well as re-emphasising the importance of using feedback from our customers and residents in a constructive and meaningful way. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen an increase in the number of complaints and often a change in the complexity of those complaints, as residents present with more detailed, cross-departmental issues.

Our Corporate Complaints Team have continued to provide regular data to the Ombudsman's Complaints Standards Authority to identify trends and patterns in public service delivery.

Our Adult Social Service Complaints process is governed by the Social Services (Complaints Procedure) (Wales) Regulations 2014 (the regulations) and Welsh Government's 'A guide to handling complaints and representations by local authority social services' and is managed by the Council's Communities Department.

I would like to close by taking this opportunity to thank our staff who work to support the Corporate Complaints and Adult Social Care Complaints process across the Council and for the service they provide every day to the residents of Carmarthenshire.

Councillor Philip Hughes

Cabinet Member for Organisation and Workforce

1. Principles

Carmarthenshire County Council's Corporate Complaints Policy has been developed and published in line with the Complaints Standards Authority – Wales, "Concerns and Complaints Policy for Public Services Providers in Wales".

The Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014 outline the procedure for handling complaints about Social Services issues in Wales. This annual report includes information in relation to complaints received as part of this procedure.

The Policy aims to emphasise the following principles:

- To ensure that as many complaints as possible are resolved at **Stage 1**, as a local resolution
- To ensure that investigations follow the '**Investigate Once, Investigate Well**' principle

2. Definition of a complaint

The definition of a complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction or concern,

- About a public service provider's action or lack of action
- Or about the standard of service provided
- Which requires a response
- Whether about the public service provider itself, a person acting on its behalf, or a public service provider partnership.

The complaints referred to within this report are those where the investigation has been completed during the review period.

Our annual report will also include any complaints investigated under the Welsh Language Measure (Wales) 2011 by the Welsh Language Commissioner and their office.

During 2021-22, no investigations of non-compliance under the Welsh Language Standards were undertaken.

3. Setting the context for 2021-22

The 2021-22 period has seen a number of significant changes and developments for the Corporate Complaints Team in terms of ways of working and particularly how we use data and information.

During the year, one of the Corporate Complaints Officers was redeployed as part of the Council's COVID-19 response to support the Registrars Team 3-days per week and continuing with the complaints role for the other 2-days per week. This redeployment ended in September 2021 but for the period April-September 2021 (and prior to that at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic) the Corporate Complaints team worked at a reduced staffing capacity.

During this period we have also undertaken a realignment of the Corporate Complaints Team, which now form part of the Policy and Involvement Team. This was implemented in October 2021 with a view to strengthening resilience within the team and to further develop the use of data and information from complaints as part of performance monitoring and service development. The team will also focus on providing support, guidance and advice across the Council on key policy and legislative areas.

Sharing of management information has been one of the key developments during the year, with the team preparing monthly reports for our Corporate Management Team (CMT) and Heads of Service, to ensure that services consider any complaints and compliments as part of their planning and delivery. This detailed information also helps us identify any barriers or trends and to ensure that our residents receive timely responses and communication. This new arrangement was introduced in January 2022.

The Performance Dashboard and Performance Observations Report, presented to Corporate Management Team on a quarterly basis, now includes key information on complaints alongside service performance information, in order for the Chief Executive and Directors to discuss any barriers to compliance and any issues relating to specific services. This enables any issues of concern to be escalated and dealt with in a timely manner.

We have also developed a corporate performance measure, which is included in the Information Technology and Corporate Policy Division's business plan. On a quarterly basis, we report on the number of complaints completed within statutory deadline, with this result being reported to Scrutiny through the performance management framework.

During 2022-23, our aim is to continue to develop the role of the team in supporting departments with service improvement information and analysis of data and key trends.

4. Stage 1 Complaints received and responded to

	Stage 1 Complaints	Stage 1 Upheld	Stage 1 Not Upheld	Stage 1 outcome not recorded
Communities * (Includes Adult Social Care)	144	40	104	37*
Education & Children's Services	31	9	22	
Environment **	610	316	294	
Chief Executive's	55	31	24	
Resources	37	12	25	
Cross departmental	8	3	5	
TOTAL	885	411	474	35

* NOTE: Outcomes not recorded for Statutory Stage 1 Complaints as per Social Care Complaints guidance

** NOTE: These numbers include complaints relating to Property Services for the year although Property Services moved over to Communities Department following service re-alignment in October 2021.

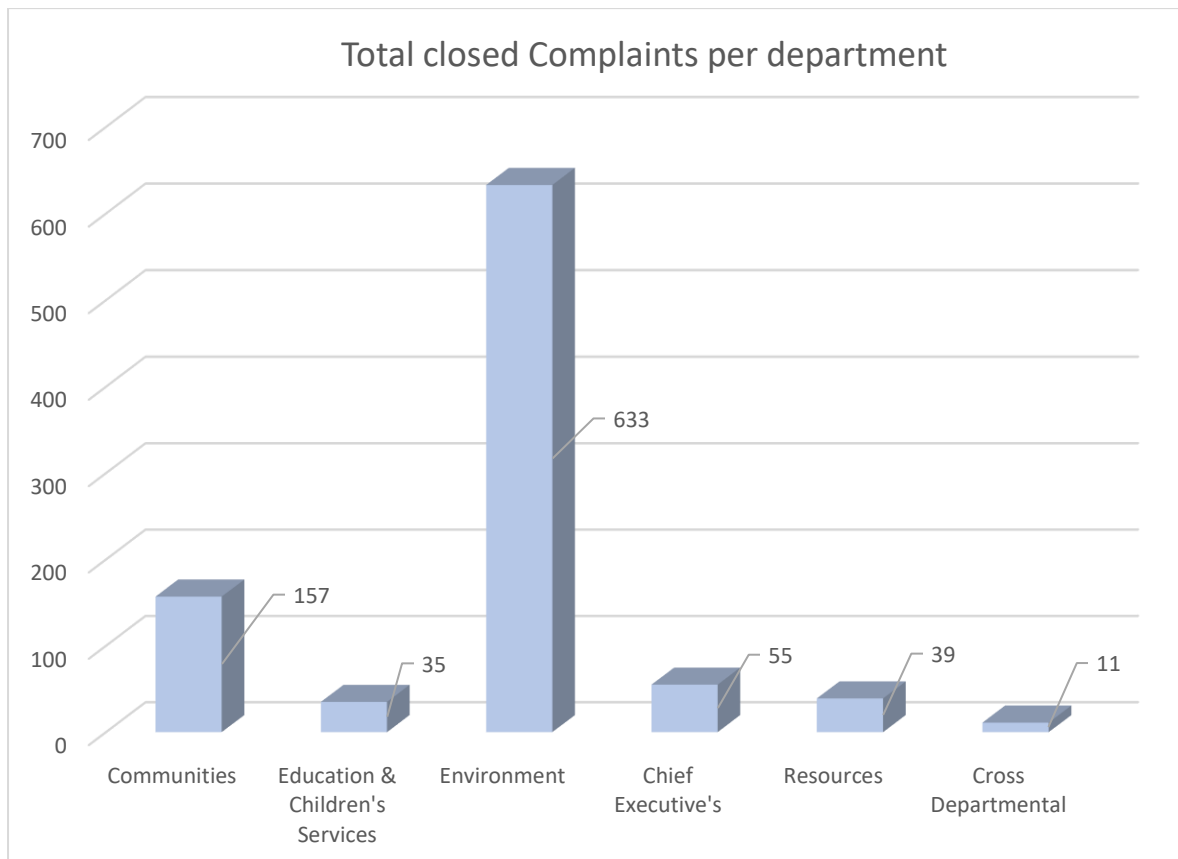
Adult Social Care complaints and compliments 2021-22

A total of 46 complaints were recorded at either Stage 1 or 2 in relation to Adult Social Care. This data provides a positive picture of the Communities Department's performance in the context of 4,190 individuals that received a social care service from Carmarthenshire County Council during this period.

This means that only 1% of individuals formally complained about the service they received.

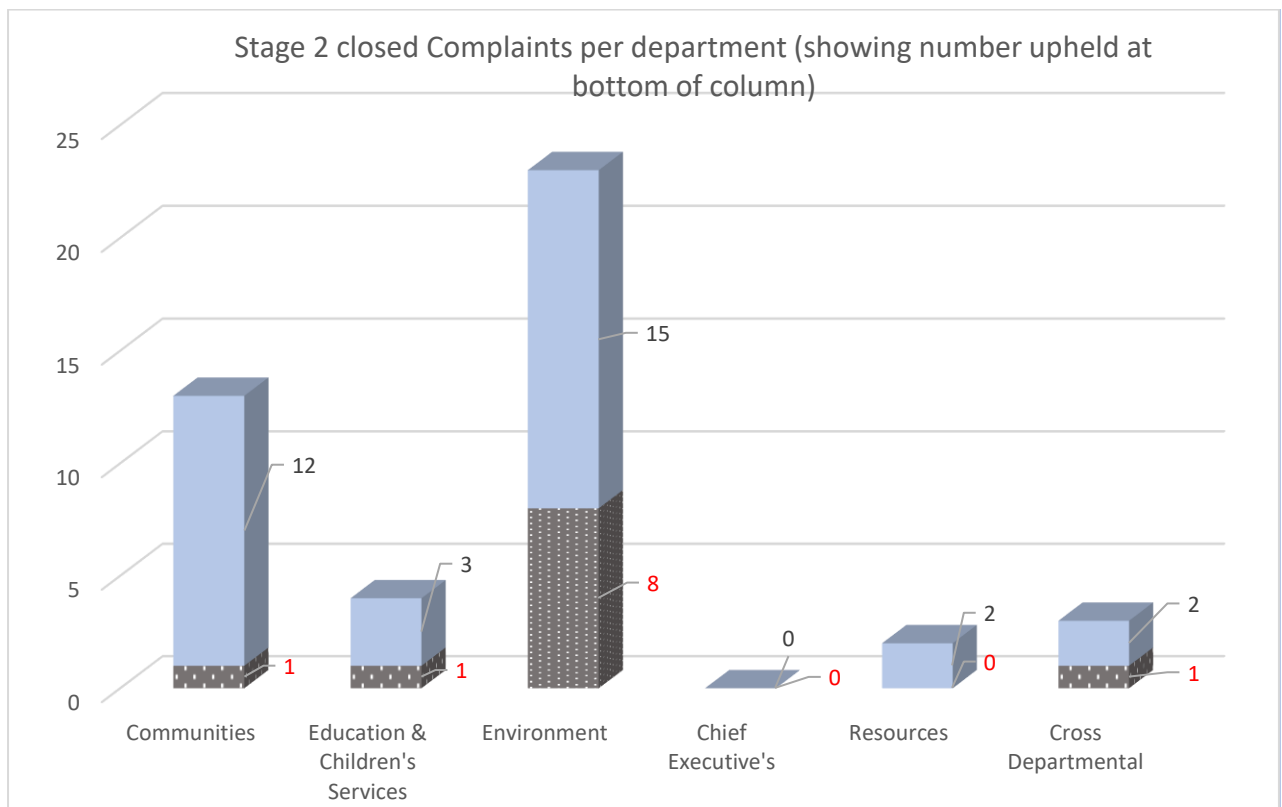
- 37 of the Adult Social Care complaints were investigated at the local resolution Stage 1.
- 9 were recorded under the Formal Investigation of Stage 2

- A further 41 complaints were dealt with by the department and recorded either as Redirects, No Further Action, on hold pending safeguarding or other.
- 8 complaints were escalated to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales following completion of a Stage 2 investigation. Of the 8 complaints, 5 were rejected and no further investigation took place.
- 2 complaints were continuing to be investigated at the end of the financial year.
- The final complaint was in relation to the effective handling of a complaint relating to an external provider. Steps have been put in place to avoid this in future.



5. Stage 2 Complaints investigated and responded to

	Stage 2 Complaints	Stage 2 Complaints Upheld	Stage 2 Complaints Not Upheld
Communities (including Adult Social Care)	13	1	12
Education & Children's Services	4	1	3
Environment	23	8	15
Chief Executive's	0	0	0
Resources	2	0	2
Cross departmental	3	1	2
TOTAL	45	11	34



6. Response timescales

	Percentage of Stage 1 complaints responded to within timescale (10 working days)	Percentage of Stage 2 complaints responded to within timescale (20 working days Corporate & 25 working days in line with Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations)
Communities	70%	46%
Education & Children's Services	65%	0%
Environment	57%	17%
Chief Executive's	50%	N/A
Resources	78%	50%
Cross Departmental	38%	33%
TOTAL	59%	27%

7. Compliments received

We receive many positive comments about our staff and the services we provide and Compliments are an important part of our learning as an organisation.

We therefore keep a record of the compliments we receive so that good practice and learning can be circulated across the Council. A total of 455 compliments were recorded during 2021/22.

A breakdown of the number received by service area can be found below.

	Compliments
Communities	76
Education & Children's Services	60
Environment	207
Chief Executive's	85
Resources	5
Cross Departmental	22
External	0
TOTAL	455

8. Redirects

The Corporate Complaints Team also deal with a high number of redirects whereby requests reach the team which are not directly linked to the corporate complaints process.

A member of the public may consider a specific issue to be a complaint where it is actually a request for a service or for further information. The team redirect these requests to the relevant services.

	Total Redirects
Communities	210
Education & Children's Services	34
Environment	392
Chief Executive's	59
Resources	39
Cross Dept	41
External	22
TOTAL	797

9. Complaints to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales 2021-22

Following the formation of the Complaints Standards Authority (CSA) under the Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) 2019 Act, all public authorities across Wales are required to report their complaints activity to the Ombudsman's office on a quarterly basis. This information is available on the Ombudsman's Complaints Standards Authority webpage.

- The percentage of complaints received during 2021-22 which ended up being referred to the Ombudsman is 0.06%.
- The number of complaints referred to the Ombudsman per 1,000 residents in Carmarthenshire is 0.29.

Carmarthenshire County Council Complaints	Received	% Share
Adult Social Services	11	20%
Benefits Administration	1	2%
Children's Social Services	2	4%
Community Facilities, Recreation and Leisure	0	0%
Complaints Handling	8	15%
COVID-19	0	0%
Education	0	0%
Environment and Environmental Health	5	9%
Finance and Taxation	1	2%
Housing	8	15%
Licensing	0	0%
Planning and Building Control	12	22%
Roads and Transport	1	2%
Various other	5	9%
TOTAL	54	

The following table shows the outcomes of the complaints which PSOW closed for the Local Authority in 2021/2022.

This table shows both the volume, and the proportion that each outcome represents for the Local Authority.

Outcome	Number	% share
Out of jurisdiction	5	10%
Premature	20	41%
Other case closed after initial consideration	17	35%
Early resolution / voluntary settlement	7	14%
Discontinued	0	0%
Other reports – not upheld	0	0%
Other reports – upheld	0	0%
Public Interest Report	0	0%
TOTAL*	49	

* Please note the different total numbers are due to the fact that some cases are carried over into the next reporting year because they haven't been closed down.

10. Our Learning

- **Complaints provide valuable feedback and are viewed by our staff as a positive opportunity to learn from experiences. This helps to drive continual service improvement and to prevent similar things happening again.**
- **For our customers, communication and regular feedback are integral to good services. Customers understand the service pressures that the public sector are facing; however, they must be kept up to date on issues in relation to the services that they use.**
- **Services and information must be accessible, with different access points and ways of communicating. We must continue to provide and develop a wide range of options for people to contact us.**
- **For our staff, complaints provide a first-hand account of the customer's views and experience, and resolving complaints early saves resources and creates better customer relations.**
- **Our colleagues across the Council need access to timely data and information so that they can support the implementation of the Corporate Complaints Policy.**

11. Our Future Priorities

We will continue to review the Complaints service throughout 2022-23 and make any necessary changes to ensure that our complaints process remains customer focused and that the Council is providing the best service possible. Below are some of our priorities moving forward so that we can achieve these goals.

Improved compliments recording

There continues to be a concern that the good service provided every day by officers within the Council is not being represented. The complaints team will look at ways of updating our recording procedure to ensure our compliments are captured and that we are continuing to take on board what our customers want. Staff will also be reminded that it is important to report compliments as well as complaints. Compliments provide very helpful feedback and provide us with a flavour of what works well and what people using our services really value.

Developing guidance for Investigating Officers

The Comments, Complaints and Compliments Policy provides process information for stakeholders; however we will be developing guidance for those undertaking investigations into Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints. This guidance will define how complaints and compliments should be identified, recognised, recorded and reported for improved consistency across the organisation. Advice and support will also be given on completing investigations.