

Council Complaints Policy Annual Report

2022-23

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Foreword

This is our Corporate Complaints Annual Report for 2022-23, a document that details the complaints and compliments received by the Council during the financial year.

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 Social Services 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'. Adult social services complaints are managed by the Council's Communities Department and children's social services complaints are managed by the Corporate Complaints team.

The feedback that we receive from our residents is key to improving our services and we are grateful for all the complaints, compliments and comments that we receive as a Council.

It should be noted that public sector organisations are facing tremendous budgetary pressures, which we have not seen the likes of before in public service. For us in the Council, this brings particular challenges for service delivery in terms of capacity and resources at a time when demand for services is increasing.

I would like to close by taking this opportunity to thank our staff who work to support the Corporate Complaints and Adult Services 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

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.

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.

Setting the context

Our resources

The Complaints Team forms part of the wider Policy, Partnerships and Performance Team within the Regeneration, Policy and Digital Division. The team consists of two full time officers, supported by the Partnerships and Complaints Manager and the Policy and Involvement Manager. During the year, we have seen the nature of complaints becoming more complex and therefore the level of support required for departments has increased. At the end of 2022-23, the Partnerships and Complaints Manager was allocating 70% of their time to work related to complaints with the Policy and Involvement Manager allocating 10% of their time.

With regards to Adult Services, the Resolution and Complaints Manager works full time and the Service Improvement and Complaints Coordinator works three days per week. They are part of the wider Performance Analysis and Systems team.

An increase in numbers of complaints

During recent years, we have continued to see the number of complaints increase. The data below includes all corporate complaints and both Adult and Children services statutory complaints.

- 707 complaints in 2020-21 (during main period of COVID-19 pandemic)
- 930 complaints in 2021-22
- 1,451 complaints in 2022-23.

This increased number of complaints in turn affects our capacity as a team to support departments and undertake the analysis and developmental work that we wish to. We believe that the insight and data held by the Complaints

team holds significant potential in supporting departments in their service planning and in influencing the implementation of key strategic projects.

Impact of significant service change

One of the key areas where an increase in the numbers of complaints has been seen during this reporting period is within the Waste & Environmental Division. During 2022-23, 619 Stage 1 complaints were received with 5 complaints investigated as Stage 2.

The division has been working on the delivery of a transformational change in approach to ensure high quality recycling and improving our performance against statutory recycling targets.

The first phase of the waste strategy was to introduce three weekly glass collection at kerbside, a move to three weekly residual waste collection and a weekly collection of dry mixed recycling and food waste. The above changes came into force on 23 January 2023, and 503 complaints (from the total of 619 for the year) were received following the implementation of the service change.

It should be noted that it is not unusual to see a spike to complaints when a service change is introduced as the new arrangements establish themselves. However, the spike seen during this financial year as a result of the changes to waste collection was significantly higher than usual, likely compounded by the fact that all Carmarthenshire households were impacted by the changes at the same time.

Management information

Sharing of management information has been one of the key developments during the year, with the team preparing monthly reports for our Directors and Heads of Service, to ensure that services consider any complaints as part of their service 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.

The 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 (now known as the Regeneration, Policy & Digital Division following re-alignment). 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.

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. During the year, we have been looking at ways of updating our recording procedure to ensure our compliments are captured and that we are continuing to share this information with departments.

Increasing awareness

Following the 2022 Local Elections held in May, a specific session was held as part of the Member Induction process to raise awareness of the processes in place. Colleagues from the Ombudsman's Office also took part, alongside the Complaints Team and the Performance and Management Information Team within the Communities Department. Members of the Governance and Audit Committee were invited to attend, and a copy of the presentation was circulated to all.

In January 2023, the Complaints Team held a specific session for third tier managers and information management officers from the Department of Place and Infrastructure. 65 attendees were present. Further to the session, the department prepared further guidance and a flow chart for

managers, to ensure that complaints were dealt with in accordance with the policy and that clear communication is in place when resolving and responding to issues.

Feedback from the session was positive and we aim to provide further training on Stage 2 Investigations during 2023/24.

Complaints in relation to the Welsh language

The Corporate Complaints Team also manage any complaints received on lack of compliance with the Welsh Language Measure (Wales) 2011 or by the Welsh Language Commissioner and their office.

During 2022/23, six complaints were received in relation to a lack of Welsh medium services.

Complaints included services commissioned by the Council not being delivered bilingually and about the Welsh medium identity of the Council on social media.

During 2022-23, no Investigations of non-compliance under the Welsh Language Standards were undertaken by the Welsh Language Commissioner's Office.

1) Corporate Complaints

Our Complaints Policy provides a framework upon which we manage the complaints, compliments and comments received by the Council. At Stage 1, we aim to deal with all complaints as quickly as possible and within 10 working days.

If it is not possible to resolve a complaint at this stage, a Stage 2 formal investigation can then be instigated. We will aim to resolve / respond to concerns within 20 working days. However, if the complaint is more complex, the investigating officer will update the complainant and explain the revised timescales.

At the end of 2022-23, 169 complaints remained open on the system.

Complaints per Department				
Complaints related to the following departments:	Stage 1		Stage 2	
	Number of complaints	Number upheld	Number of complaints	Number upheld
Chief Executive	59	36	0	0
Corporate Services	75	20	2	1
Education & Children Services *	9	6	2	0
Place & Infrastructure	769	495	14	4
Communities *	410	266	9	2
Cross Departmental	7	3	1	1
Total:	1329	826	28	8

** This table does not include data in terms of Adult and Children Services complaints dealt with under the Social Services Policy. These are covered in sections 2 and 3 of the report.*

Response Times for Complaints per Department

Complaints related to the following departments:	Stage 1			Stage 2		
	Number of complaints	Number of complaints responded to within timescale		Number of complaints	Number of complaints responded to within timescale	
Chief Executive	59	36	(61%)	0	0	(0%)
Corporate Services	75	68	(91%)	2	0	(0%)
Education & Children Services	9	8	(89%)	2	0	(0%)
Place & Infrastructure	769	436	(57%)	14	1	(7%)
Communities	410	155	(38%)	9	0	(0%)
Cross Departmental	7	4	(57%)	1	0	(0%)
Total:	1329	707	(53%)	28	1	(4%)

Chief Executive

Complaints related to the following divisions:	Stage 1		Stage 2	
	Number of complaints	Number upheld	Number of complaints	Number upheld
Administration & Legal	2	2	0	0
Electoral & Registration Services	3	0	0	0
ICT & Corporate Policy	3	1	0	0
Media & Marketing	44	30	0	0
People Management	3	1	0	0
Regeneration	4	2	0	0
Total:	59	36	0	0

Corporate Services

Complaints related to the following divisions:	Stage 1		Stage 2	
	Number of complaints	Number upheld	Number of complaints	Number upheld
Financial Services	1	1	0	0
Revenues & Financial Compliance	73	18	2	1
Cross Department	1	1	0	0
Total:	75	20	2	1

Education & Children Services

Complaints related to the following divisions:	Stage 1		Stage 2	
	Number of complaints	Number upheld	Number of complaints	Number upheld
Access to Education	4	2	0	0
Education & Inclusion Services	1	0	0	0
Cross Department	4	1	2	0
Total:	9	8	2	0

Place & Infrastructure

Complaints related to the following divisions:	Stage 1		Stage 2	
	Number of complaints	Number upheld	Number of complaints	Number upheld
Business Support	3	1	1	1
Planning	31	8	8	0
Transport & Highways	116	26	0	0
Waste & Environmental Services	619	460	5	3
Total:	769	495	14	4

Communities				
Complaints related to the following divisions:	Stage 1		Stage 2	
	Number of complaints	Number upheld	Number of complaints	Number upheld
Homes & Safer Communities	110	46	6	0
Leisure	32	14	1	0
Housing Property & Strategic Projects	267	205	2	2
Cross Department	1	1	0	0
Total:	410	266	9	2

** This table does not include data in terms of adult services complaints dealt with under the Social Services Policy*

Cross Departmental				
	Stage 1		Stage 2	
	Number of complaints	Number upheld	Number of complaints	Number upheld
Cross Departmental	7	3	1	1

Reporting on timescales

Managing response times continues to be challenging, for a number of reasons. The increase in the number of complaints across the authority, alongside the complexity of issues, can make complying with the timescales set in our policy, difficult.

We will continue to monitor our response timescales and build on the data available in 2022/23 to provide further detail in our Annual Report for 2023/24.

During 2023-24, we will be developing a performance dashboard in order to present further breakdown of timescales for Stage 1 in future reports.

The data for Stage 2 investigations is noted below.

Stage 2 response timescales	
Timescales of responses:	Stage 2
	Number of complaints
Within 20 days	1
Within 2 months	11
Within 3 months	8
Within 4 months	4
Within 5 months	2
Within 6 months	0
Closed after 6 months but within 7 months	1
Closed after 9 months but within 10 months	1
TOTAL	28

Corporate Compliments

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 2022-23.

From 1 April 2023, we will be recording all compliments received on the Info@Work system and therefore, comparative data will be available as part of future annual reports. The monthly reports provided to Directors will also include the compliments data.

2) Adult Services statutory complaints

Our Adults Services statutory complaints are managed in accordance with The Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014. The “Guidance” referred to within this report is ‘A Guide to handling complaints and representations by local authority social services’ (2014).

The Guidance outlines the roles of individuals within the local authority when it comes to social services complaints. The Director of Social Services (namely the Director of Communities in Carmarthenshire County Council) has formal oversight of the complaints process and is responsible for reporting on complaints within their Annual Report. In Carmarthenshire County Council a Head of Service has been nominated on behalf of the Director to undertake the role of Senior Officer responsible for complaints to ensure compliance with the procedure.

The Resolution and Complaints Manager fulfils the role of Complaints Officer and has the responsibility of managing the procedures for handling and considering complaints for adult social services. They commenced in post in October 2022. It is required that they are independent of both professional line management and direct service providers.

Our aim is to increase learning within teams to improve the quality of the service provided and to reduce the volume of complaints received. In addition to this post the service has appointed a part-time Service Improvement and Complaints Coordinator to support the Resolution and Complaints Manager. Adult Services complaints continue to be supported by the wider Performance Analysis & Systems Team.

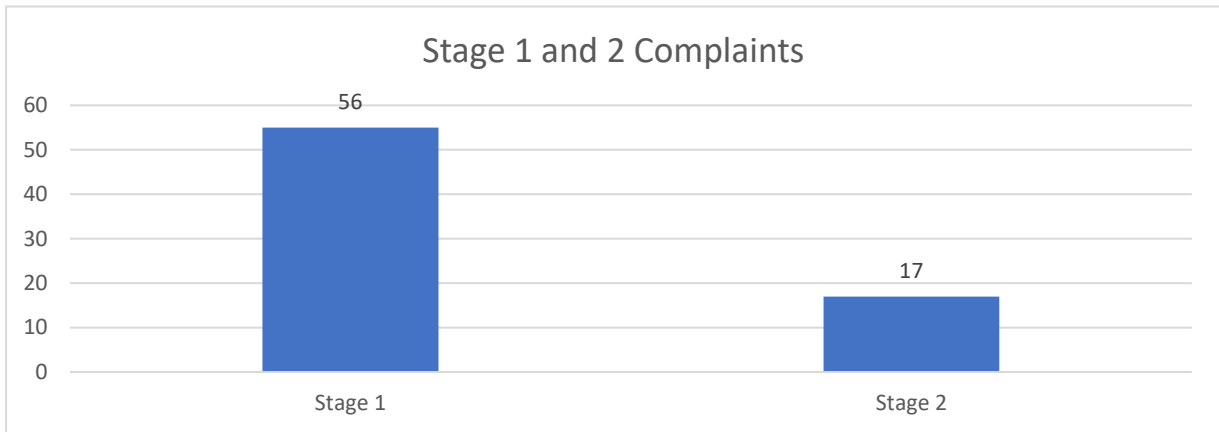
The Complaints Audit Group continues to meet on a quarterly basis and complaints information is included in the Directors annual report.

Adult Services Complaints 2022-23

A total of 73 complaints were received and recorded in relation to Adult Social Services between 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2023.

Summary

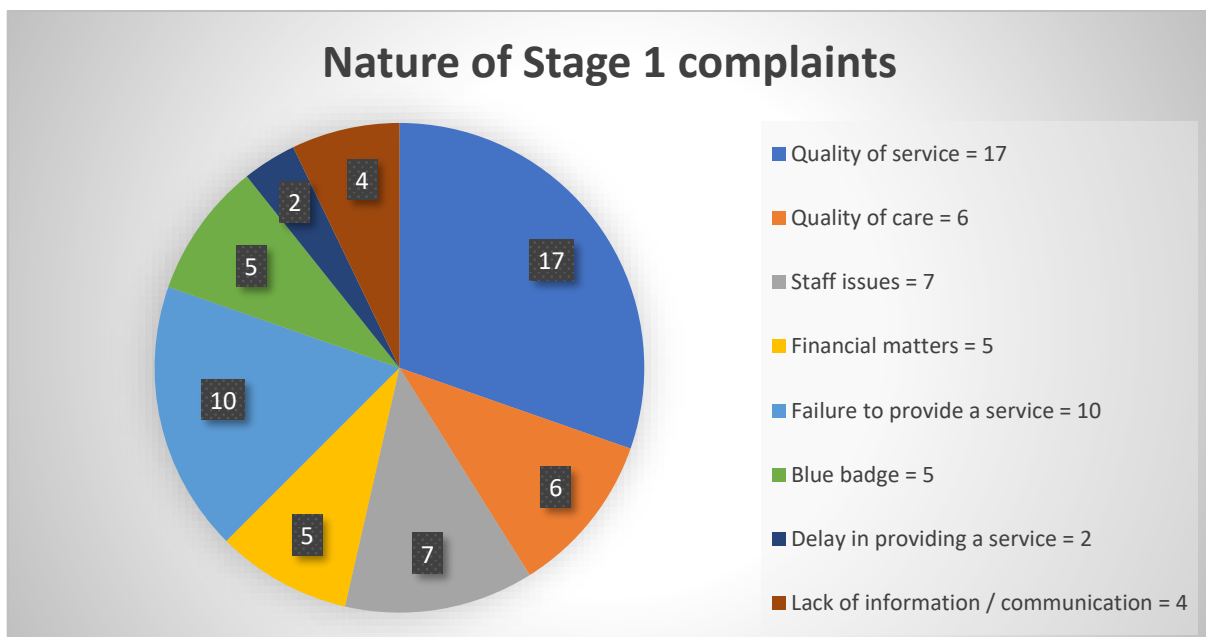
- 56 of the Adult Social Services complaints were considered at the Local Resolution Stage 1.
- 17 were investigated under the Formal Investigation of Stage 2.
- A further 41 contacts were dealt with by the department and recorded either as Redirects, No Further Action, On Hold pending safeguarding or Other.



The number of stage 1 and 2 complaints dealt with by the department shows an increase in both stage 1 and stage 2 complaints compared to the previous year, with almost double the number of stage 2 complaints being recorded.

Nature of Stage 1 complaints received

The illustration below identifies the nature of the 56 complaints considered under Stage 1 of the procedure in 2022/23.



Stage 1 Outcomes

Stage 1 complaints are closed by mutual consent, therefore no “upheld/not upheld” decision needs to be made. This is in keeping with the Ombudsman data returns. However, within the response letter tangible outcomes to the complaint are recorded and all actions are monitored.

Response to Stage 1 complaints within statutory timescales

The statutory timescale for all Stage 1 complaints (Local Resolution) is 15 working days from the date that the complaint is acknowledged. The discussion must take place within 10 working days and if there is a mutually acceptable resolution of the matter, the local authority must write to the complainant with details of the terms of the resolution within 5 working days.

This timescale may only be extended in exceptional circumstances with the agreement of the complainant. In 2022/23, 47 Stage 1 complaints were acknowledged within timescale with 9 acknowledged outside of this timescale. The majority of these were due to further enquiries being made with the relevant managers or the team being unable to establish contact with the complainants. It is now standard process for the complaint to be acknowledged prior to any further enquiries being made with managers. Of the 9 that fell outside of the 2 working day acknowledgement timescale, none were acknowledged outside of 5 working days.

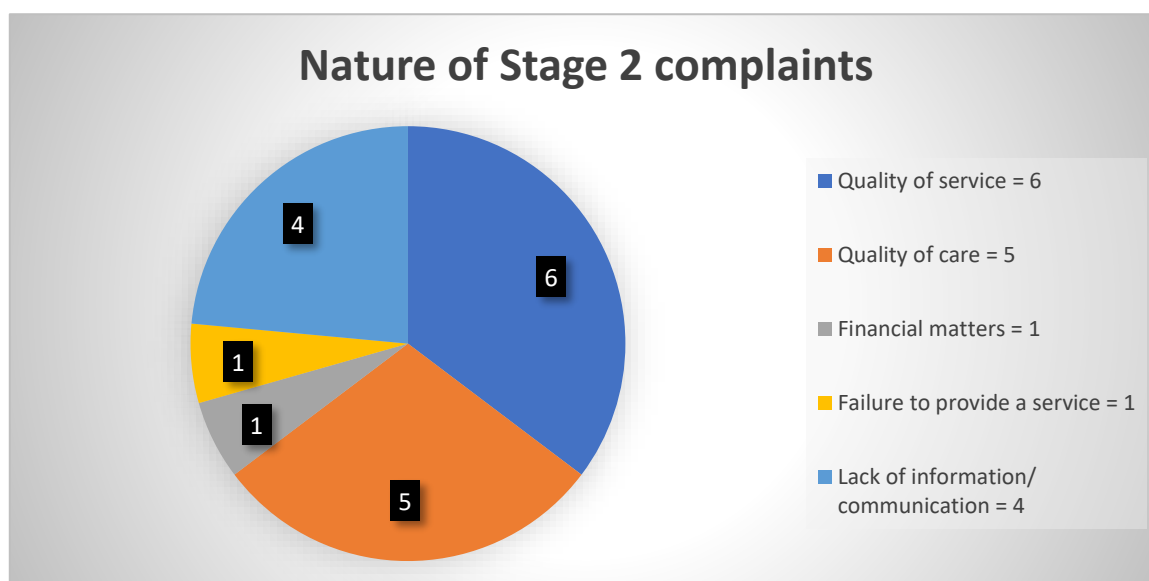
Stage 1 Complaints that have been concluded

At the end of 2022/23 we have closed a total of 51 Stage 1 complaints, 4 of which were outstanding from 2021/22 as they had been received in the last two weeks of March 2022. 37 (73%) of these complaints were closed within the statutory timescale including 13 that were concluded with an extension under exceptional circumstances, as agreed with the complainant.

Of the 14 (27%) that were closed outside of the statutory timescale, 13 of these delays were attributed to staffing issues such as absence and workloads and 1 was due to the staff member being unable to make contact with the complainant. On average Stage 1 complaints responded to outside of the statutory timescale were closed within 47 working days.

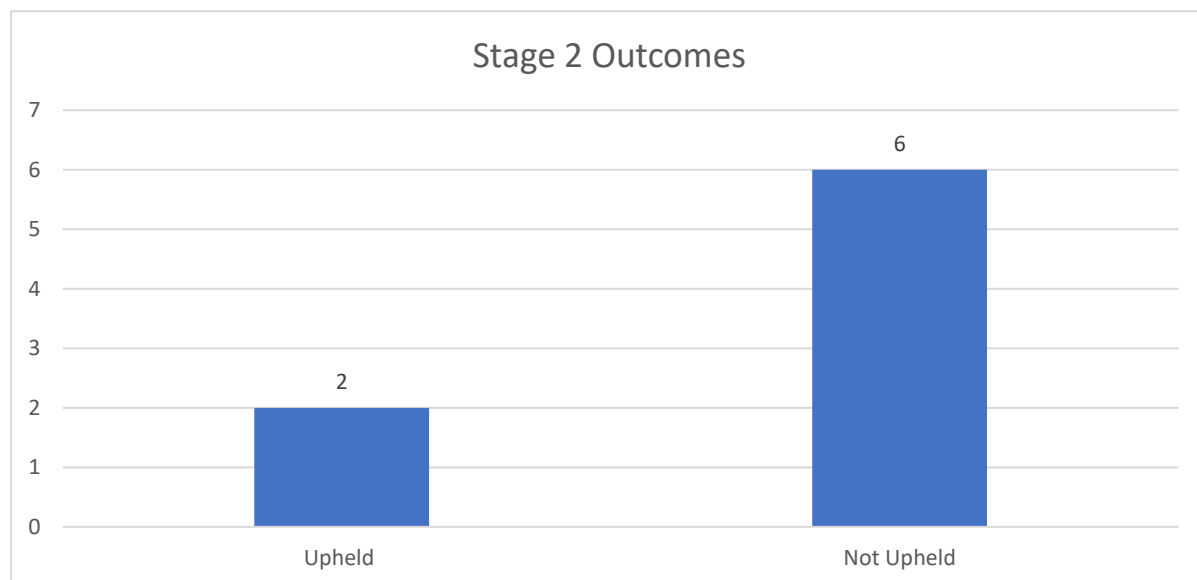
Nature of Stage 2 complaints received

The illustration below identifies the nature of the 17 complaints considered under Stage 2 of the procedure in 2022/23.



Stage 2 Outcomes

The Guidance states that the local authority must take responsibility for determining whether or not a Stage 2 complaint is upheld and the action to be taken as a consequence. 8 of the 17 Stage 2 complaints were concluded in 2022/23 with 2 upheld and 6 not upheld.



Stage 2 Timescales

In terms of statutory timescales, the local authority must compile a formal written record of the complaint within 5 working days of the date that it is received or moves from Stage 1 to Stage 2. The Formal Investigation stage must be completed, and a full written response issued to the complainant, within 25 working days of the start date. The timescale can only be extended in exceptional circumstances and the local authority must write to the Complainant to explain this. The full response must be issued as soon as possible and no later than 6 months from the date on which the complaint was received.

Stage 2 Complaints that have been concluded

At the end of 2022/23 we have closed a total of 8 Stage 2 complaints, none of which were closed within 25 working days but all of which were completed within 6 months due to the nature and complexity of the complaints and in order to ensure thorough investigations took place. The complainants were kept informed of progress. On average Stage 2 complaints were responded to within 66 working days.

Complaints received outside of the 12-month limit

The guidance states that:

A complaint [...] may be made up to 12 months after the date on which the matter which is the subject of a complaint [...] occurred; or, if later, the date on which the matter which is the subject of the complaint [...] came to the notice of the complainant [...] The time limit will not apply if the local authority is satisfied that there are good reasons for a

complaint [...] not being made within these time limits and despite the delay it is still possible to investigate the complaint [...] effectively and fairly.

In 2022/23 the local authority has not accepted nor declined any complaints on the basis that the matters referred to fell outside of the 12-month timeframe.

Complaint recommendations and lessons learned

The department log all of the recommendations from both Stage 1 response letters and Stage 2 reports and devise actions plans which are shared with managers to complete. The Resolution and Complaints Manager will follow up on these recommendations until they are complete.

Examples of recommendations and actions from 2022/23 are outlined below:

Recommendation

For staff to remain in communication with family members to ensure they are aware of the process of assessment and the stages.

Action

Discussion held in whole team meeting.

Recommendation

That CCC considers reviewing their "Fact Sheet 2: Moving into a Care Home A guide to Financial Assessment and Charges" to include in the CHC section details of who to contact if someone thinks they may be eligible for CHC funding.

Action

Just ASC page has been updated and this has also been incorporated into the CHC training that is delivered to staff within the Local Authority.

Recommendation

We recommend that all staff in Social Services, especially those involved in this investigation, are reminded about their statutory duty to provide information and evidence to Stage 2 investigators, especially key documentation such as assessments and care plans.

Action

Locality Manager has discussed this in the relevant Manager's meeting.

Resolution and Complaints Manager has informed IO that they can help facilitate the gathering and sharing of this information in future.

Complaints Awareness training has been developed for all staff along with some FAQ's and within this they are reminded of their duties regarding complaints.

Themes, trends and learning opportunities are identified and brought before the Process and Practice Board and then shared with team managers by the Resolution and Complaints Manager on a quarterly basis. If required, lessons learned events are held and chaired by the relevant Head of Service. There were no lessons learned events in 2022/23.

The following table illustrates the themes being identified from the complaints made with examples included from 2022/23:

Theme	Example
Lack of Communication	Following the outcome of safeguarding interventions.
Lack of Procedures (including procedures being out of date, insufficient etc)	Around communicating between different departments.
Not following Procedures	Around the inventory of belongings when a person arrives and departs a care home placement.
Lack of Training	Around effective communication for care home staff.
Lack of Resources	Concerning availability of care to support hospital discharges.

Ombudsman Complaints

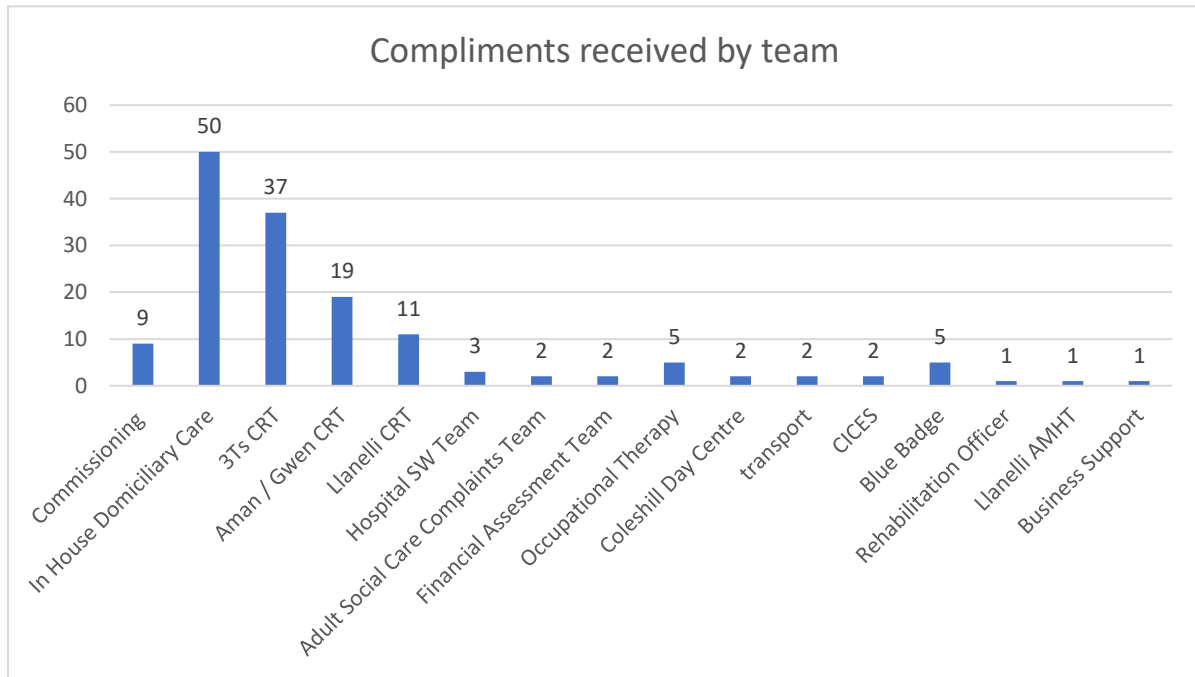
In 2022/23 three complaints have been escalated to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales following completion of a Stage 2 investigation. The Ombudsman has not accepted any of these complaints and no further investigation took place.

Service Improvement

The Resolution and Complaints Manager commenced in post in October 2022 with the responsibility of coordinating processes relating to complaints and undertaking preventative work. The aim of this is to increase learning within teams to improve the quality of the service provided and to reduce the volume of complaints received. This role continues to be supported by the wider Performance Analyst & Systems team.

Adult Services Compliments

A total of 152 Adult Services compliments were received in 2022/23. The highest volume of compliments received are within the In-House Domiciliary Care Team. This number of compliments shows a slight decrease from 2021/22 (172 compliments received).



Examples of Compliments

- “Just a quick note to say thank you to you and the girls for the service you have provided to my mum. I would like to say a heartfelt thank you especially to [named staff] who have treated my mum with respect and love, and I know she was challenging at times! I cannot begin to show my thanks and gratitude to have been able to keep mum at home for these last few years. Thank you again for all your support.”
- “The family would like to thank the carers who did a fantastic job of looking after [named individual] and supporting her to remain living in her home. [She] appreciated their help and would often say so. They are extremely caring and skilled, an essential service to the Community and an absolute lifeline to many vulnerable people. We feel they are not valued and appreciated enough and felt they deserved recognition and a complement.”
- Diolch o galon ac hefyd am y galwadau heddiw.

3) Children Services Complaints

The Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014 outlines the procedure for handling complaints about Social Services issues in Wales. This section includes complaints dealt with under the procedure in relation to Childrens Services.

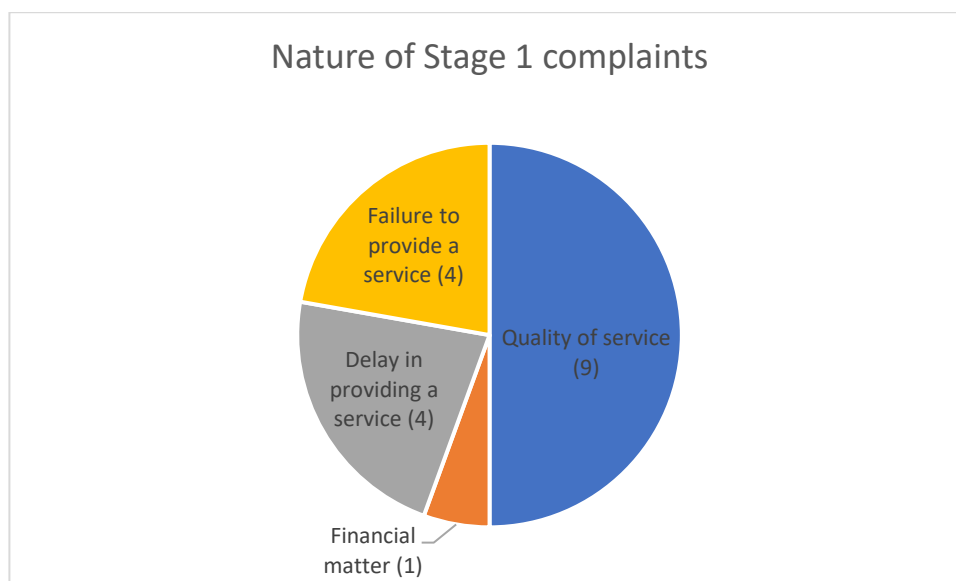
A total of 21 complaints were received and recorded at either Stage 1 or 2 in relation to Children and Family Services between 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2023.

Summary

- 18 of the Children and Family Services complaints were considered at the Local Resolution Stage 1.
- 3 were investigated under the Formal Investigation of Stage 2.

Nature of Stage 1 complaints received

The illustration below identifies the nature of the 18 complaints considered under Stage 1 of the procedure in 2022/23.



Response to Stage 1 complaints within statutory timescales

The statutory timescale for all Stage 1 complaints (Local Resolution) is 15 working days from the date that the complaint is acknowledged. The discussion must take place within 10 working days and if there is a mutually acceptable resolution of the matter, the local authority must write to the complainant with details of the terms of the resolution within 5 working days.

This timescale may only be extended in exceptional circumstances with the agreement of the complainant. At present every complaint received by email is acknowledged by an automated email reply. A review of the

acknowledgement process is to be undertaken by the Corporate Complaints Team and the Childrens Services Division.

Stage 1 Complaints that have been concluded

At the end of 2022/23 we have closed a total of 18 Stage 1 complaints. 7 of the complaints were closed within the statutory timescale and 11 were concluded outside of those timescales. With the 11 out of timescale, agreement was sought and given by the complainants.

The reasons that these were concluded out of timescales was attributed to staffing issues such as absence and workloads; some of the situations were complex and needed exploring to ensure the complaint was considered by the correct officer.

The majority of the complaints were resolved by explaining the processes clearly to the complainant or by improving the communication between the social worker and the complainant.

The outcomes of Stage 1 complaints were provided in writing to all complainants.

No complaints were received outside of the 12 months time limit during 2022/23.

Stage 2 Investigations

The statutory timescale for all Stage 2 complaints (Independent Investigations) is 25 working days from the date that the complaint is acknowledged. During this time frame we had three Stage 2 Investigations, all of which were concluded within the timescales.

Ombudsman Complaints

During 2022/23, one complaint was escalated to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales following completion of a Stage 1 investigation. This matter was discontinued by the Ombudsman on the basis that it was premature and the file was closed.

Children Services Compliments

Children Services receive a number of compliments noted both by children, families and professionals that we work with. There's been numerous examples of Judges expressing their gratitude for the work and time that our social workers dedicated to the families that they work with, however, we do not always formally record these as compliments.

Below is a summary of some of the compliments that we have formally recorded.

Examples of Compliments

- “It’s a shame to see [social worker’s name] go. I feel she’s helped me talk about my problems and made me realise that this is ok and ok to ask for help. I do not feel I have had to deal with everything myself and [social worker’s name] has opened by eyes to the benefit of having social workers when needed and realising that it’s not a bad thing when things aren’t good. I have been able to open up to [social worker’s name] and this has helped me massively, I trust [social worker’s name] and she always prepares me for situations I get anxious about. I feel [social worker’s name] has been very hands on and amazing. I will miss [social worker’s name].”
- “...., [named individual] has been respectful, understanding, open minded and she hasn’t judged me. [named individual] will say it as it is but always in a nice way. I feel like I could tell her what was going on and feel safe by doing this.”
- “[social worker’s name] has been able to make and sustain a safe and trusting relationship with a very unregulated and anxious young girl who finds it extremely difficult to trust adults. This is due to [social worker’s name] excellent skills in communication and engagement and his determination to know her. His commitment and dedication to her has been unwavering and extends well beyond working hours.”
- “The emotional support and commitment [social worker’s name] have shown [named individual] since he has been open has been more than I could have asked from you. [named individual] has been so fortunate to have you by his side supporting him during the most difficult time in his life. You have been the one positive constant for him from his time at home, to his removal, police interviews, concerns in school, contact with mum/extended family and placement moves. I know that this has not always been easy for you but you have always prioritised [named individual] and you are his strongest advocate.”
- “I just wanted to thank you and your Pods for the hard work that you do. As you know, post pandemic times has brought its challenges for us all but particularly for Social Workers! Commitment, hard work and perseverance has made a real difference to the children that we work with, and several people including Foster Carers have commented on how Social Workers go over and above their remit to ensure that the children’s needs are met. I guess at times it’s tough and lonely at ground level, so, I think Social Workers should know that their hard work is appreciated.”

4) 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.

Redirects also include concerns that cannot be addressed via the complaints process for a specific reason, for example, something that relates to a Policy decision or if there is a more appropriate method of redress. The team redirect these requests to the relevant services.

Redirects per Department	
Redirected communication related to the following departments:	
Chief Executive	53
Corporate Services	74
Education & Children Services	52
Place & Infrastructure	758
Communities	321
Cross Departmental	46
External to the Authority	38
Total:	1342

5) Ombudsman for Wales

Following the formation of the Complaints Standards Authority (CSA) under the 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.

Complainants are also able to approach the Ombudsman's office directly and the information provided by the office is noted below:

- The number of complaints received by the Ombudsman was 53.
- The number of complaints referred to the Ombudsman per 1,000 residents in Carmarthenshire is 0.28%.

The following table shows the outcomes of the complaints which the Ombudsman closed for the Local Authority in 2022-23.

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

Outcome	Number	% share
Out of jurisdiction <i>(The complaint is not within the Ombudsman's jurisdiction)</i>	6	10%
Premature <i>(Complainants are asked to contact the organisation directly as it appears that the organisation has not previously had a reasonable opportunity to consider the complaint)</i>	27	45%
Other case closed after initial consideration <i>(There may be an alternative route of appeal or a legal process has commenced or the case may not be timely)</i>	20	33%
Early resolution / voluntary settlement (noted as Interventions in the Ombudsman's data) <i>(If the body has not had an opportunity to consider and respond, it is unlikely that the Ombudsman will consider a complaint)</i>	7	12%
Discontinued	0	0%
Other reports – not upheld	0	0%
Other reports – upheld	0	0%
Total number of closures*	60	

* Total number varies due to crossover between financial years – 7 complaints carried over from 2021-22.

8) 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.
- In terms of Adult Services Complaints, when recommendations are made, the department log these on an action plan which is sent out to the teams to follow up. Trends and learning opportunities will be identified from these recommendations and then brought to Process and Practice Board and subsequently disseminated in team meetings on a quarterly basis by the Resolution and Complaints Manager. In terms of governance the Complaints Audit Group continues to meet on a quarterly basis and complaints information is included in the Director's annual report.
- Any recommendations from an Adult Services Stage 2 report are included in an action plan which is sent out to managers to complete. If there are issues that need addressing, we will hold a lessons learned event which is chaired by the Head of Service. This is for best practice and to ensure the teams learn from the complaint. Currently there has been one lessons learned event held following the completion of a complex Stage 2 complaint.

9) Our Future Priorities

We will continue to review the Complaints service throughout 2023-24 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.

Sharing information

A significant increase has been seen in the number of complaints received by the Council (56% between 2021-22 and 2022-23). We are of course mindful of the specific increase within Waste & Environmental Services as a result of a service transformation; however, there is an increase across all departments.

As a team, we are constantly looking at ways to improve data collation in order to improve sharing of information with relevant service departments and to improve response times to complainants.

We will review the Process and Practice Board and Complaints Audit Group arrangements utilised for Adult Social Care complaints and develop a means to introduce a similar arrangement for corporate complaints in order to fully engage departmental lead officers and Heads of Service on key learning points and patterns from complaints.

Service user communication

During 2022-23, we have seen a clear trend in the number of complaints received relating to lack of communication and sharing of information with our residents. Closing the loop in terms of feedback, timescales, appointments etc is key and often, the lack of communication is the root of the complaint, rather than the service provided. This was a particular trend in relation to property Repairs complaints and was reported as part of quarterly performance monitoring arrangements.

It is therefore pleasing to note that we have seen an improvement with the situation around complaints relating to Property Repairs, with an improvement in the handling of complaints when received. Introducing the Housing Repairs Scheduling Team Leader's role at the end of January 2023 has played a key part in this as they have focused on improving customer care and complaints co-ordination and management. Further developments in complaints management have continued to positively impact. Often just knowing how things stand in terms of timescales leads to increased satisfaction from residents.

Further details on progress in this area will be provided in the 2023-24 annual report.

Developing guidance for Investigating Officers

During 2022-23, the team have been collating information and looking at specific areas of improvement for inclusion in the guidance for Investigating Officers. This guidance will be prepared for those undertaking investigations into Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints and 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.

Monitoring timescales

Our performance management information and performance indicator shows a decline in our compliance with the corporate policy timescales. We recognise that capacity is an issue, not just for the Complaints Team (2 FTE posts) but across the Council and that appointing officers to investigate both at Stage 1 and Stage 2 can be a challenge.

We are currently not recording data to be able to report on the exact length of time which individual complaints run over by; however, we will be looking to introduce arrangements to do so during 2023-24. This evidence is essential as service improvement information for our departments and in improving our understanding of the challenges faced when responding. These are issues that we will look into during the next financial year.

Adult Services Complaints Priorities

In March 2023 the Adult Services complaints team underwent an internal audit and, although they are currently awaiting the final report, some initial recommendations have been made. A detailed update will be provided in the annual report for 2023-24.

It has been recommended that the team produce a procedural document based on the legislation and guidance and this will be a priority going forward.

Another recommendation is that complaints training should be offered to all staff. This is an area that the team have already been developing and it is planned that the following training will be offered on a regular basis:

- Complaints awareness training for all staff
- Stage 1 investigators training
- Stage 1 investigators training for providers.

In addition to the audit recommendations the team are also in the process of moving all complaints recordings from an Excel spreadsheet to the Eclipse Social Care Case Management System. The motivation behind this is to ensure all records are contained within a central location and to utilise the system to ensure accurate reporting of information.

There will also be a focus on preventative work to increase learning from complaints, within the teams, to improve the quality of the service provided and reducing the number of complaints received.

Children Services Complaints Priorities

During 2023/24 we will evaluate the process through which we record and manage our Children Services complaints. We recognise that the link between the support provided by the Corporate Complaints Team and the strategic direction given by Children Services needs to be further strengthened.