

GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABNET



Report to a meeting of Gwynedd Council Cabinet

Date of Meeting:	12 October 2021
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Nia Jeffreys
Contact Officer:	Geraint Owen
Contact Telephone Number:	01286 679335
Title of Item:	Six Monthly Report – Complaints and Service Improvement 2021/22

1 THE DECISION SOUGHT

The purpose of the report is to provide an overview of the Complaints and Service Improvement situation over a 6-month period, highlighting successes, challenges and developments. The Cabinet is invited to consider the information submitted.

2 THE REASON FOR THE NEED FOR A DECISION

Ensure that effective Complaints and Service Improvement arrangements are in place for the people of Gwynedd.

3 INTRODUCTION

3.1 Background

The Council's Complaints and Service Improvement procedure was introduced in 2015, formed under the supervision of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. It corresponds with Welsh Government guidelines and is therefore in line with the complaint's procedures of other public bodies.

The procedure was adopted by the Cabinet with the aim of bringing specific benefit to the citizen by concentrating on the solution rather than the process, and enabling Officers do deal more swiftly with complaints. The average time it takes for complaints to be resolved is used as a measure of the Council's performance.

The procedure is also in keeping with the "Ffordd Gwynedd" culture of empowering staff to make decisions and deliver for the people of Gwynedd.

The Concerns and Complaints Policy was updated on 1 April 2021, and the responsibility for implementing the Complaints and Service Improvement procedure was transferred to the Corporate Support Department under the care of the Service Improvement Officer within the Organisation's Learning and Development team.

It should be noted that this procedure is not relevant to Social Services users as there is a separate statutory procedure for them. Schools also implement their own complaints procedures.

3.2 Complaints Response – an explanation of the terms used

3.2.1 Resolving Informal Complaints

Complainant informally contacts the Service Improvement Officer or the relevant Service to resolve the concern.

3.2.2 Formal Complaint Investigations

The complaint is investigated within the relevant Department, by an officer who is senior enough and is independent from the source of the complaint.

3.2.3 Complaint to the Ombudsman

The complainant could go to the Ombudsman if they are not satisfied with the Council's formal response.

After looking at the complaint, the Ombudsman may decide on one of the following:

- *No Investigation* - where the Ombudsman is satisfied with how the authority has dealt with the matter and feels that no further investigation is required. It could also be a matter beyond its jurisdiction.
- *Premature* - if the Ombudsman believes the authority has not yet had an opportunity to consider the matter.
- *Hold a further investigation* - where the Ombudsman feels that further investigation is needed, to assess how the authority has dealt with the matter.
- *Settlement* - where there is an agreement with the complainant and they accept the resolution.

4. PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

In accordance with the Council's Concerns and Complaints Policy a report is submitted every six months to the Cabinet to summarise the situation and inform of any developments pertaining to Complaints and Service Improvement.

This report summarises the developments during the five months from April to August 2021, and focuses on Valid Formal Complaints and Ombudsman Complaints.

The report provides a high-level overview, emphasising the response to Complaints to Improve Service. It also notes any emerging patterns or trends.

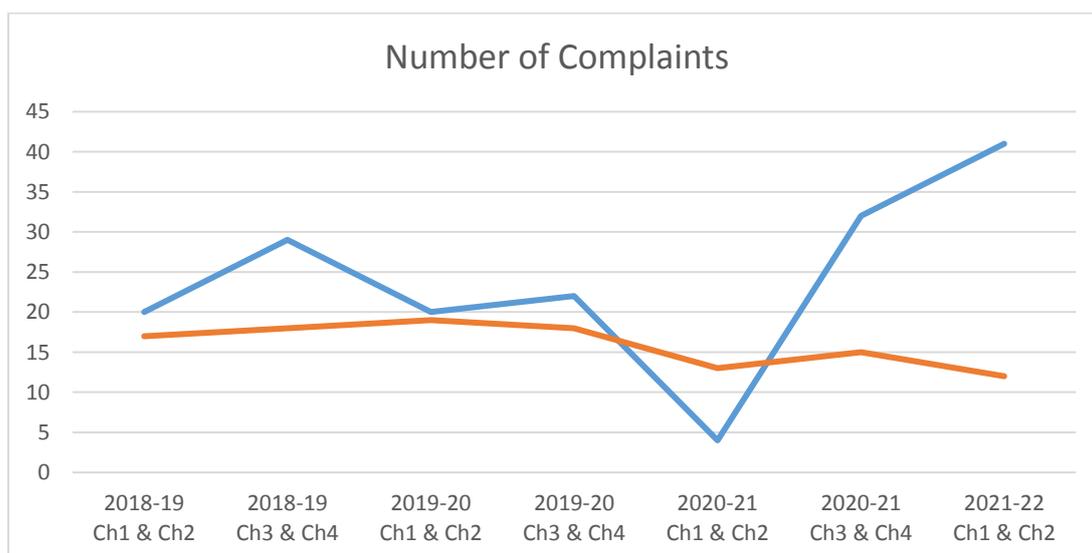
5. QUANTITATIVE DATA

5.1 Number of Complaints: Current Situation

Type of Complaints	Number 2020/21		Number 2021/22	
	1 April - 31 August 2020		1 April - 31 August 2021	
Formal Complaints (Valid)	4		41	
Complaints for the Ombudsman	12 11 No Investigation 1 Premature 0 No response received 0 Settlement 0 Enquiries 0 Investigations 0 Reports 0 Complaints withdrawn		12 9 No Investigation 1 Premature 0 No response received 2 Settlement 0 Enquiries 0 Investigations 0 Reports 0 Complaints withdrawn	

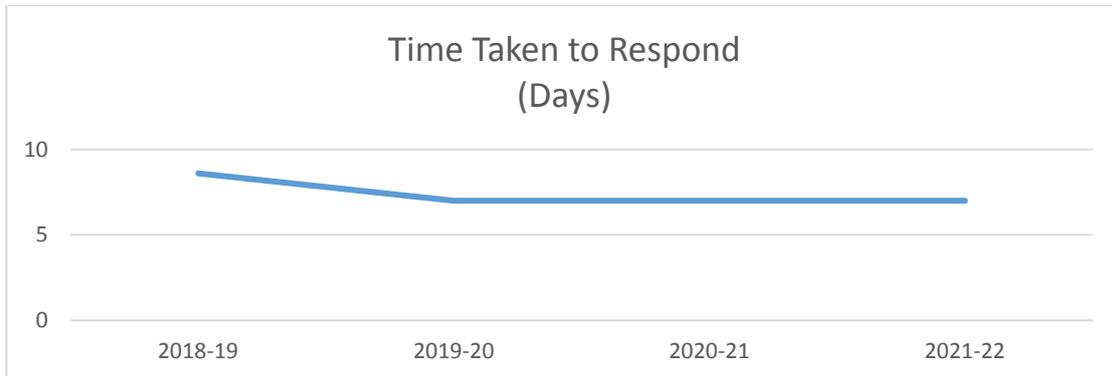
5.2 Number of complaints: Position over Time since 2018-19

Type of Complaints	Number 2018-19		Number 2019-20		Number 2020-21		Number 2021-22	
	Q1 & Q2	Q3 & Q4	Q1 & Q2	Q3 & Q4	Q1 & Q2	Q3 & Q4	Q1 & Q2	Q3 & Q4
Formal Complaints (Valid)	20	29	20	22	4	32	41	
	<i>Total 49</i>		<i>Total 42</i>		<i>Total 36</i>			
Complaints for the Ombudsman	17	18	19	18	13	15	12	
	<i>Total 35</i>		<i>Total 37</i>		<i>Total 28</i>			

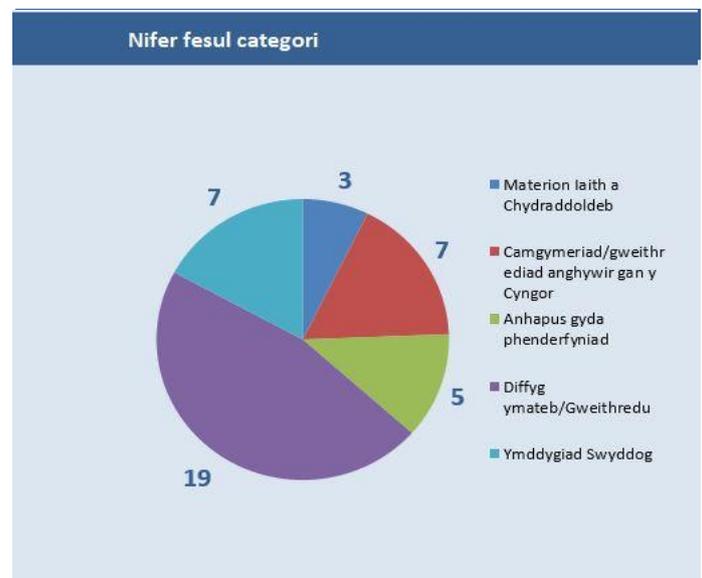
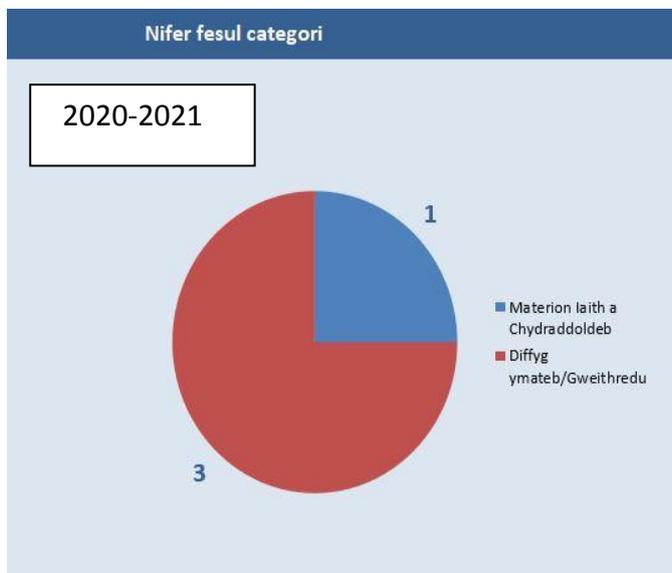


5.3 Response Time over Period since 2018-19

2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
8.6 days	7 days	7 days	7 days



6. ANALYSIS OF THE COMPLAINTS (GENERAL)



Analysis per Department - See Appendix 1

Detailed information can be provided about specific Complaints if needed.

7. MAIN MESSAGES

- After an initial fall, a significant increase was seen in Formal Complaints during the pandemic, but the number of Complaints to the Ombudsman have remained consistent.
COMMENT: It appears that this trend can be seen Nationally by the majority of Authorities (confirmation by the Ombudsman).
- The trend over a longer period shows that the number of Formal Complaints has been falling gradually since 2018-19 despite the recent increase.

- In terms of response time, it can be seen that the figure has remained consistently at 7 days (8.6 days in 2018-19).
- Overall there was a change in culture, with Services receiving complaints in a more positive manner to learn from them, and the response time falling.

8. NATIONAL DATA

National data was published by the Ombudsman's Office summarising the figures for Complaints reported by Welsh Authorities. See Appendix 2. We contacted the Ombudsman Officer to ask for an interpretation of the figures. They welcomed our enquiry and noted that they wished for every Authority to consider the data as carefully as we do. The following was noted (verbally):

- The table should not be considered as a 'league table'.
- The low numbers do not mean that Councils are better than those with higher levels, and it was possible that Councils did not record their complaints in the same way.
- Gwynedd's figures appear to be realistic.
- The procedure in Gwynedd is obviously working, and we are ready to learn lessons from Complaints.

9. LOOKING TO THE FUTURE/NEXT STEPS

The Annual letter (2020/21) for Gwynedd Council from the Ombudsman has just been received (Appendix 3). *'This letter discusses information from a year unlike any other in recent memory, and as such may not be useful for establishing trends or patterns. Information received during this remarkable year will, however, bring insights on how public services reacted in the face of unprecedented demand and the most difficult of circumstances.'*

The letter to the Cabinet is intended to assist members in their scrutiny of the Council's complaints performance and any actions to be taken as a result.

As requested in the letter, we will:

- Engage with the Ombudsman's Complaints Standards work
- Access training for staff
- Provide complaints data
- Inform the Ombudsman of the outcome of the Council's considerations and proposed actions on the above matters by 15 November.

We are already developing training in the Customer Care field jointly with the Ombudsman's Office by using complaints as a learning tool. It is intended to hold a pilot in the autumn.

We intend to continue to work with Departmental management teams and officers within the Service to ensure an understanding of the Complaints procedure and their commitment to implement them. In light of this, we hope to reduce the time we take to respond to Complaints, and continue to Improve Services.

The Successes Wall (“Wal Lwyddianau”) is now live, and it is very good to see that a large number of Thanks/Compliments have come in from the public. Seeing the public's appreciation is a great help in raising staff morale, especially front-line staff.

10. OPINION OF THE STATUTORY OFFICERS

The Monitoring Officer:

It's incorporated into the Complaints process that the Cabinet receives reports on the Councils complaints arrangements from the perspective of maintaining the quality of services. With the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 – Section 115 giving the Audit and Governance Committee the function of reviewing and assessing the authority's ability to handle complaints effectively the arrangements will need to be reviewed to address this change.

The Head of Finance:

Nothing to add to the report from a financial propriety perspective.