

## CYNGOR GWYNEDD – Report to Cyngor Gwynedd’s Cabinet

<b>Title of report:</b>	Annual Complaints and Service Improvement Report 2022/23
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Cynghorydd Menna Trenholme
<b>Contact Officer</b>	Ian Jones
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	19 September 2023

### 1. Decision sought

Cabinet is asked to approve the report and offer any relevant comments or suggestions about the Council’s performance in dealing with complaints in an appropriate and timely manner.

### 2. The reason why the Cabinet needs to make the decision

The purpose of the report is to provide an overview of the Council’s performance in relation to dealing with complaints and improving services, highlighting successes, challenges, and developments. This is to ensure that the Cabinet is satisfied with the performance over the periods in question.

An analysis of quantitative and qualitative data is presented, which is a measure of the Council’s performance in this context for the period 1 April to 31 August 2023 together with preliminary information about the previous years.

A copy of the Ombudsman’s Annual Letter setting out the Council’s performance for the year 2022/23 is also submitted.

### 3. Introduction and Reasoning

#### 3.1 Background

The Council’s “Complaints and Service Improvement procedure” was introduced in 2015, drawn up 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 Cabinet adopted the procedure with the aim of bringing specific benefits to the citizen by focusing on the solution instead of the process and allow Officers to deal quicker with complaints.

The ownership over responding to complaints was moved to the individual Departments, but with the function of harmonizing and offering guidance continuing under the leadership of the Monitoring Officer with the support of the Service Improvement Officer.

The *Concerns and Complaints Policy* was updated on 1 April 2021, and responsibility for the implementation of the *Complaints and Service Improvement* procedure was transferred to the

Corporate Support Department under the care of the *Service Improvement Officer* within the *Organisational Learning and Development* team.

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

### **3.2 Responding to Complaints - An explanation of the terminology that is 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 Investigating Formal Complaints**

Complainant presents a formal complaint through the complaints procedure. An investigation is undertaken by an officer within the Service, 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 the way the authority has dealt with the matter and feels that there is no need for a further investigation. It could also be a matter beyond its jurisdiction.
- *Premature* - if the Ombudsman is of the opinion that 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. Frequency of the Report**

Due to the unique circumstances of the past few years, the period of reporting to the Cabinet has varied from between 6 and 12 months. The Concerns and Complaints Policy notes that a report should be submitted to the Senior Leadership Team every quarter and to the Cabinet twice a year and this is the intention for the future.

'Live' data is available to Heads of Department, the Senior Leadership Team and the Cabinet at any time upon request.

This Report summarises the developments for the period 01/04/2022 – 31/08/2023, focusing on Valid Formal Complaints and complaints submitted to the Ombudsman.

The figures to date for this year are noted below -

- 29 Valid Formal Complaints between 01/04/23 and 31/08/23
- 13 Ombudsman Complaints between 01/04/23 and 31/08/23  
(8 No Investigation; 2 No Investigation – Premature; 3 Settlement)

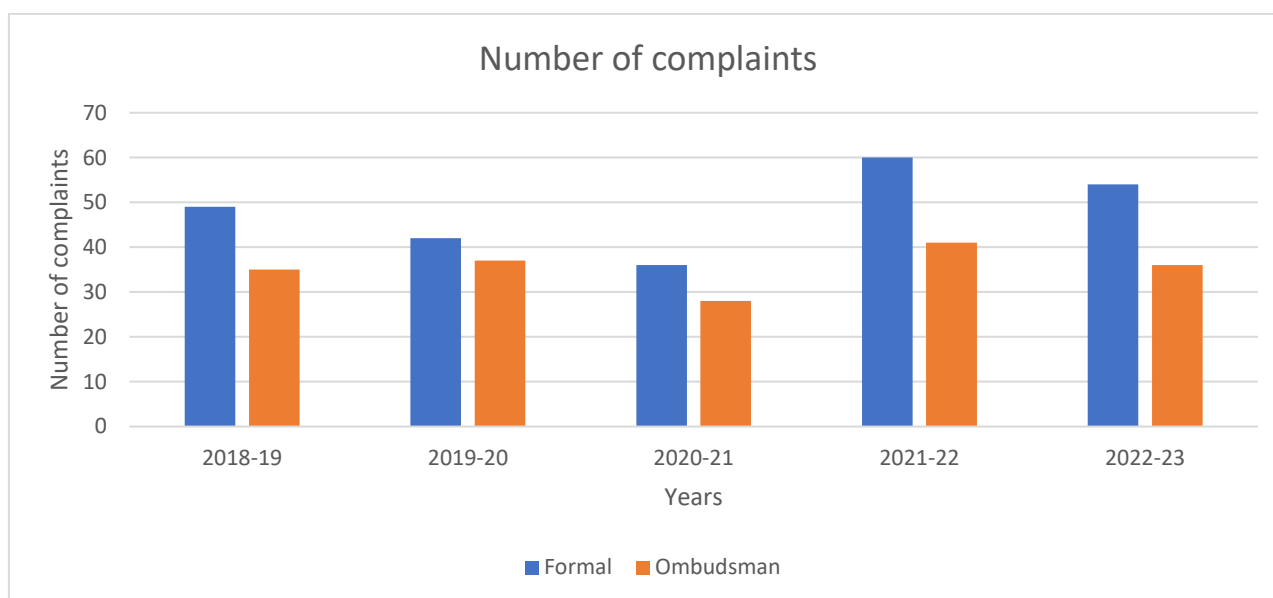
## 5. Quantative Data

### 5.1 Number of Complaints: Current Situation

Type of Complaints	Number 2021/22 (01/04/2021 - 31/03/2022)	Number 2022/23 (01/04/2022 - 31/03/2023)
<b>Formal Complaints (Valid)</b>	60	54
<b>Complaints to the Ombudsman</b>	41: 33 No Investigation 2 Premature 0 No response 5 Settlement 0 Enquiry 0 Investigation closed 0 Report 1 Complaint withdrawn	36 25 No Investigation 7 Premature 0 No response 4 Settlement 0 Enquiry 0 Investigation closed 0 Report 0 Complaint withdrawn

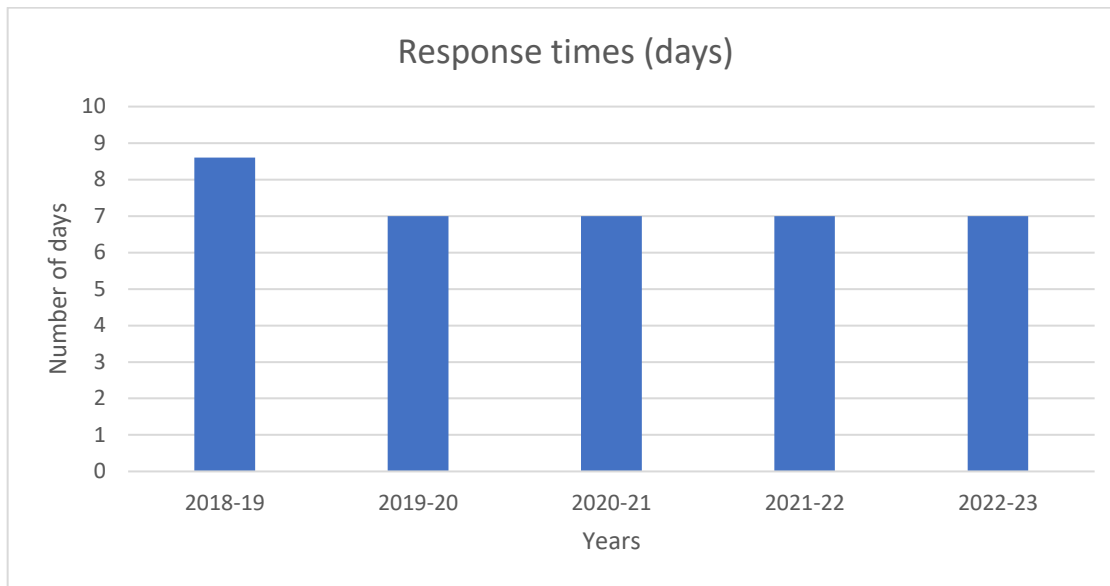
### 5.2 Number of complaints: Situation over a Period Since 2018-19

Type of Complaints	Number 2018-19	Number 2019-20	Number 2020-21	Number 2021-22	Number 2022-23
Valid Formal Complaints	49	42	36	60	54
Complaints to the Ombudsman	35	37	28	41	36



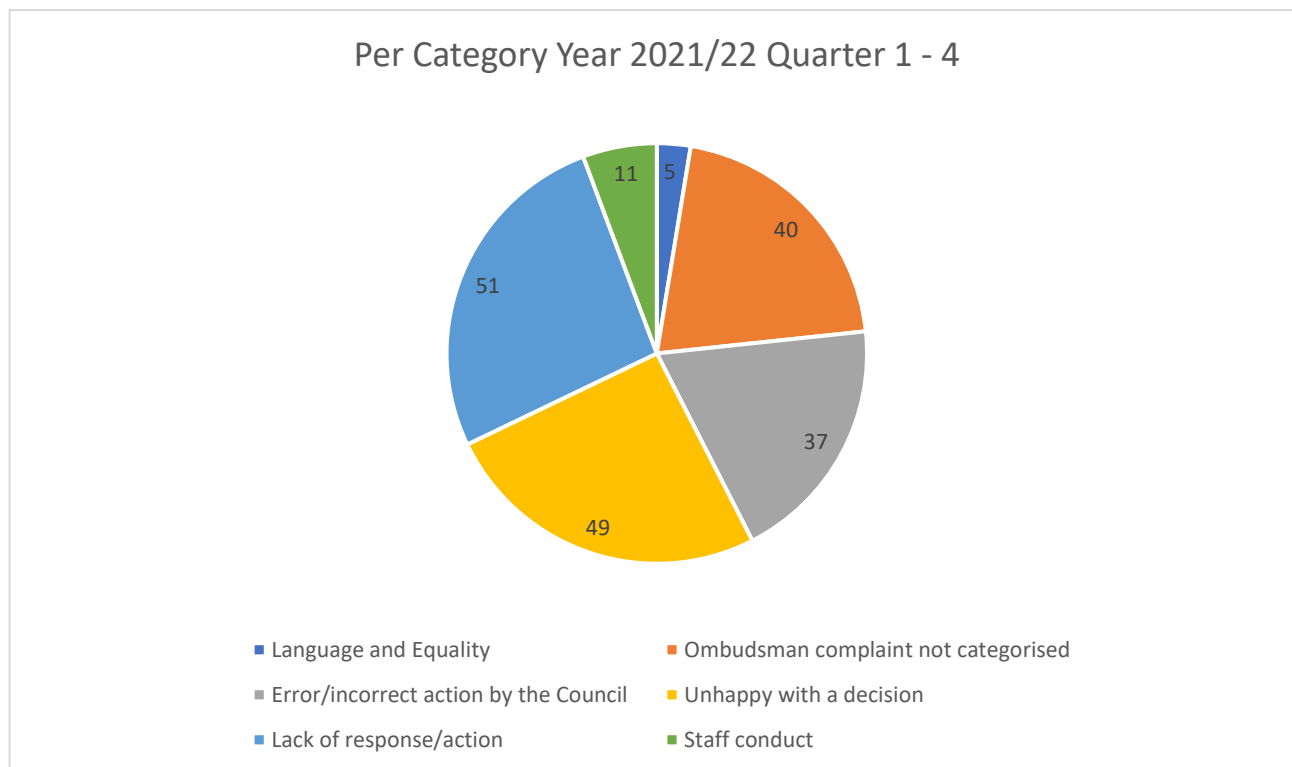
### 5.3 Response Time over a Period Since 2018-19

2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
8.6 days	7 days	7 days	7 days	7 days

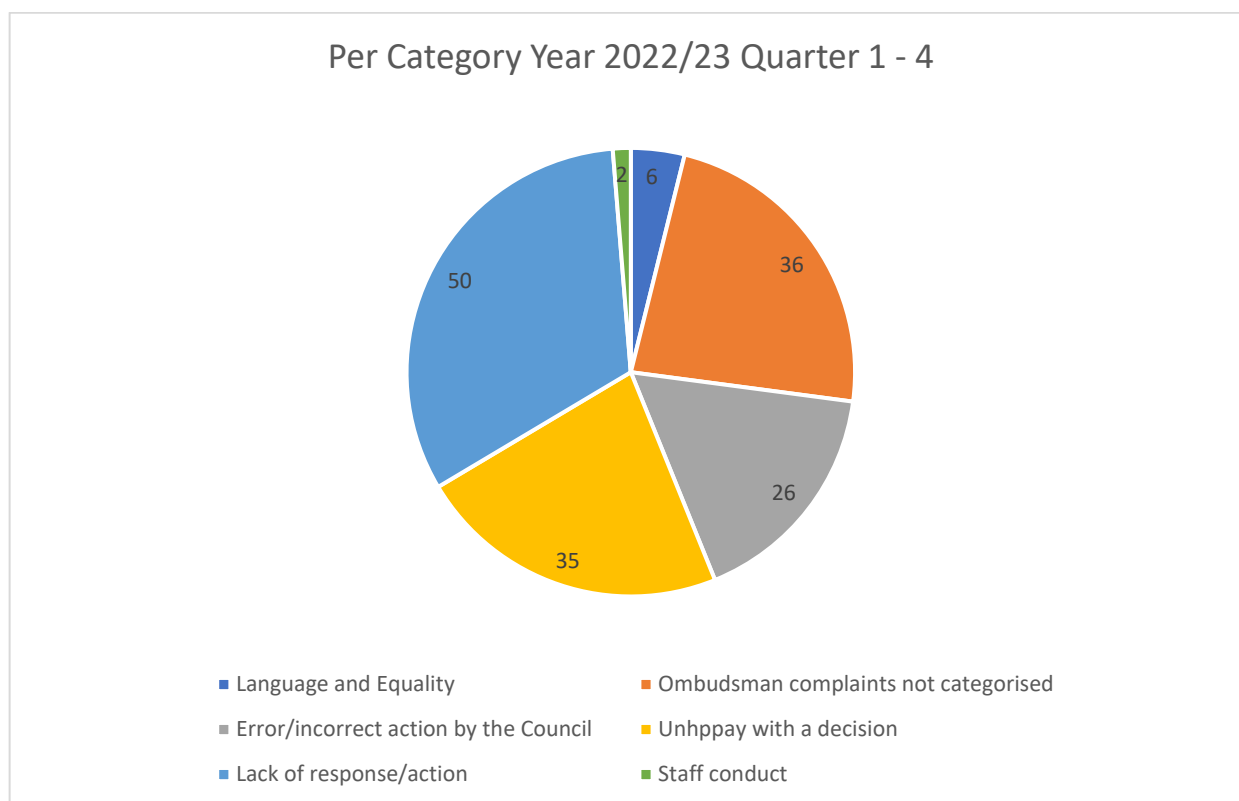


## 6. Analysis of the Complaints (General)

### Per Category 2021/22 Year Quarter 1 – 4



## Per Category 2022/23 Year Quarter 1 – 4



### Analysis per Department – See Appendix 1

Detailed information can be provided about specific Complaints if needed.

### 7. Main Messages

- A slight reduction is seen, in the number of Formal Complaints and Ombudsman's complaints in 2022/23.
- The pattern / trend over a longer period shows that the number of Formal Complaints reduced gradually between 2018/19 and 2021/22 when it increased significantly. The number is now decreasing again although not as low as 2018/19.
- The response time has remained consistent on 7 days (8.6 days in 2018/19).
- A change in culture was seen, with Services on the whole receiving complaints in a more positive and constructive way, in order to learn from them, with the response time reducing.

### 8. The Ombudsman's Annual Letter 2022/23

The Ombudsman's Annual Letter was not received until 17<sup>th</sup> of August this year. The letter is attached for your attention. I would like to highlight some comments and recommendations made by the Ombudsman-

I would encourage Cyngor Gwynedd, 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."

## **9. Next Steps**

We will report back to the Ombudsman that the Annual Letter has been submitted to the Cabinet and to the Governance and Audit Committee.

We will continue to engage with the Ombudsman and their Complaints Standards work, fully implement the exemplary policy and provide accurate and timely complaints data. Any Training they offer will be offered and promoted by us.

We have collaborated closely with the Ombudsman Office's Training Officer on the development of 'Customer Care' training, by using complaints as a learning tool. This Training is now very popular with the staff and a programme of dates are in place for the year to come.

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.

A new Training session "Ateb Gohebiaeth" ("Responding to Correspondence") has been developed. This is as a result of evidence, which involves comments from several Members, that suggests that not all officers respond to enquiries in a timely manner. A pilot session was held for a small number of staff, and the feedback was positive and constructive. But as the group was fairly small, it was decided that a second pilot should be held with a larger group of staff, from various services, before offering the title to a wider audience. The second pilot had been arranged for May, but it had to be cancelled, as a number of attendees had to pull out at the last minute due to other commitments.

The Successes Wall is still growing, 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. The comments of the Statutory Officers

### Head of Finance Department:

*“Nothing to add from the perspective of financial propriety.”*

### Monitoring Officer:

*The complaints process includes provision that the Cabinet receives reports on the Councils complaints arrangements from the perspective of maintaining quality services. I note that the Governance and Audit Committee will be considering the effectiveness of the arrangements in accordance with their statutory duties. I will also be reporting to the Standards Committee in respect of the data in relation to the ethical framework.*

### List of Attachments

<b>Attachment 1</b>	<b>Table Showing Analysis of Complaints</b>
<b>Attachment 2</b>	<b>Ombudsman’s Annual Letter for 2022/23</b>