

<b>MEETING</b>	<b>Audit and Governance Committee</b>
<b>DATE</b>	<b>11 September 2025</b>
<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Annual Complaints and Service Improvement Report 2024/25</b>
<b>PURPOSE</b>	<b>Updating the Committee on the content of the Ombudsman's Annual Letter and the Council's arrangements for dealing with Complaints</b>
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## **1. Decision sought**

A Report on the corporate complaints process was requested by this committee last year. This report is therefore submitted in response to that request outlining the Council's complaints arrangements. It is hoped that in giving this overview it can be demonstrated that there are adequate arrangements in place to deal with corporate complaints about Council Services. To accompany the report and set context, the Welsh Ombudsman's Annual Letter for the year 2024/25 which has been received in recent weeks is also presented as an appendix. The Ombudsman has requested that the letter be presented to this Committee.

This Committee is requested to accept the report and make any comments or recommendations on the complaints procedure in doing so.

## **2. Introduction and Context**

This report provides an overview of the Council's arrangements for dealing with corporate complaints and presents the Ombudsman for Wales' comments on our arrangements and performance as a Council in the context of dealing with complaints. The Ombudsman's comments highlight successes, challenges, and developments specifically for the 2024/25 period. Comments are received by the Ombudsman in the formal order of an Annual Letter. The most recent Annual Letter for the year 2024/25 was received on 14/08/2025 this year and contains an analysis of quantitative and qualitative data demonstrating the Council's performance. The Letter is attached as Appendix 2 to this report.

In accordance with Statutory and Non-Statutory Guidance for Principal Councils in Wales – substantive provision in the Local Government Act 2000, the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 and Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 published in June 2023 the Committee is required to ensure that there are effective arrangements for dealing with complaints within the Council.

It should be noted that the Committee's role is not to consider whether individual complaints have been dealt with appropriately, but rather, consider the effectiveness of the complaints process, as a whole. As a result, there is

no reference in the report to any individual complaint or departmental performance.

This report is presented as a basis for the Committee to reach conclusion as to the effectiveness of current arrangements. For the information of the Committee, there has been no change in the procedure or the Concerns and Complaints Policy during 2024/25 therefore, the content of the Ombudsman's letter is based on the Policy adopted by the Council in 2021. A new Customer Care Plan has been adopted in early Summer 2025 following a rigorous consultation plan as part of the Ffordd Gwynedd work plan. The training and awareness raising on the new Customer Care Scheme will not only be a way of reminding officers across the Council of the Complaints procedure, but also, hopefully improve services for residents which will in turn reduce the number of complaints.

The Committee is invited to consider the information submitted, and to offer any comments or relevant suggestions.

### **How Gwynedd Residents are aware of the Complaints procedure**

The report below provides an overview of the procedure in place for the handling and processing of Corporate Complaints. Prior to outlining this procedure, it must be noted that there are some exceptions to the Corporate Complaints procedure. These exceptions are for work areas where alternate arrangements exist, and Appendix 1 of this report provides further details about those exceptions. They are complaints in the fields of:

- ❖ Care
- ❖ Education
- ❖ Employment
- ❖ Byw'n lach

### **Corporate Complaints Procedure**

It is very important that the public are aware of how to contact the Council if they wish to raise a concern or complaint. The current complaints procedure dates back to 2015 when it was established. At that time an article introducing the system was submitted within Newyddion Gwynedd, which at the time was distributed to the homes of Gwynedd residents.

The Concerns and Complaints Policy was written under the supervision of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. It is in line with Welsh Government guidance and is therefore consistent with the Complaints arrangements of other public bodies.

The Policy was updated in 2021 and responsibility for the implementation of the Complaints and Service Improvement procedure was transferred to the Corporate Services Department under the care of the Service Improvement Officer, who was at the time part of the Organisation's Learning and

Development Team. The Officer and the responsibility for the procedure now sit within the Support Team within the Corporate Services Department.

Details of the procedure can be found on the Council's website, and copies of the Policy, which are bilingual and include a Praise or Complaint Form, are also available in the Council's Siopau Gwynedd and in all Libraries.

A paper copy of the Policy can be sent out to anyone if they need a paper copy at any time of course.

<https://www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/en/Council/Documents---Council/Contact-us/Polisi-Pryderon-Saesneg-2023-Layout-1.pdf>

An Easy Read copy of the Policy is also available.

<https://www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/en/Council/Documents---Council/Contact-us/Hawdd-i-Darllen-Saesneg.pdf>

If a customer needed a copy in a different language or needed an interpreter to assist with their complaint, this would be facilitated upon request.

### **How Gwynedd Residents can report a complaint or concern ?**

A concern or complaint can be reported by visiting the Council's website [www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru](http://www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru)

A form is available which is a multi-purpose form, which can be used to Praise or to Complain.

<https://diogel.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/HunanwasanaethGweFfurflenni/cy/CwynCyffredinol/Index>

If a customer needs a paper copy, they can request a copy of the form from the person they are already in contact with.

The central complaints contact point can be contacted on 01766 771000 if a customer wishes to make a complaint over the phone.

Complaints can be e-mailed to [cwynion@gwynedd.gov.wales](mailto:cwynion@gwynedd.gov.wales)

Complainants can also write to the Service Improvement Officer, Corporate Services, Gwynedd Council, Shirehall Street, Caernarfon, Gwynedd, LL55 1SH

The function of the Service Improvement Officer means that they act as an Advocate on behalf of the customer.

### **The Council's arrangements for dealing with complaints**

When a complaint reaches the Council whether via the online form, by email, by letter or by phone, the aim is to acknowledge it within 5 working days and

inform the customer who the investigating officer is and response to the complaint. A copy of the Concerns and Complaints Policy will be appended in the acknowledgment message to them. If their complaint was by letter, an acknowledgement letter and paper copy of the Policy will be sent to them. If the complaint came over the phone, the customer will be asked for their preference as to how they would like further contact and updates e.g. by email, or by letter etc.

Once a complaint is received, it is recorded on the central complaints system and is passed on to the relevant Service/Officer for attention.

There are two stages to the procedure. Stage 1 (Informal Complaint) and Stage 2 (Formal Complaint). An Informal complaint will usually be resolved more or less immediately by the Services. Of course, investigating and responding to a Formal complaint is a longer process.

In accordance with the Policy, the Service has up to 20 working days to investigate and respond to any complaint. If they need more time to investigate and respond, then the customer and the Service Improvement Officer must be informed at their first opportunity. At the same time, they are expected to give a definite date as to when the customer can expect a full response.

If there is going to be a longer delay for whatever reason, the customer and the Service Improvement Officer should always be kept aware of this.

The Service Improvement Officer keeps track of the response timeline and reminds Services of the timeline as required. Instances have arisen whereby the Officer has had to send several reminders to the Service as a complaint remains open for longer than 20 days and the Service has not explained that they need more time etc.

If a Service has failed to respond within the 20 working days and has not explained that they need more time to the customer and the Service Improvement Officer, then the customer has the right to take the matter forward to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

### **Arrangements if the Customer is not happy with the response**

The Services are always expected to include a standard paragraph containing details of how to contact the Ombudsman's office in their responses to Formal complaints. If a customer is dissatisfied with the response they have received from a Service, then they have the right to take the matter further, which is to the Ombudsman if they wish.

### **Learning lessons from Complaints, and improving services**

In the majority of cases the Services acknowledge mistakes and take learning opportunities in order ensure that no such complaint arises again. Cases do arise however, for various reasons, when Services are not so open to

improvement, and in such instances the Service Improvement Officer will intervene by encouraging and persuasion. This can be a tough task and in some cases the Service Improvement Officer has encouraged a customer to take the complaint to the Ombudsman, who in turn, following their own investigation, has requested the Council to Settle a complaint.

The Service Improvement Officer is the Council's point of contact for the Ombudsman's Office.

The Ombudsman's Officers will make contact with an Enquiry, Request for more information or Response. Depending on each case, their response may be either No Investigation, No Investigation - Premature, Investigation or Report.

A report on the Council's Complaints performance, specifically on valid Formal Complaints and Ombudsman Complaints is presented to Cabinet twice yearly where the Cabinet will consider responses. The Ombudsman's Annual Letter is presented to Cabinet annually, and this year's Letter will be included in the next report to Cabinet later in the year.

### **3. Ombudsman's Annual Letter**

As previously stated in the Report, the Annual Letter was received this year on 14/08/2025. We will consider and hold internal discussions over the next few weeks to consider the statistics presented in the letter, along with any adjustments or improvements that can be made resulting from those discussions as part of efforts for continuous improvement.

We will of course be reporting back to the Ombudsman on when the Letter was presented 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.

### **List of Appendices**

Appendix 1: Details of exemptions to Corporate Complaints Procedure

Appendix 2: Ombudsman's Annual Letter for 2024/25

## Appendix 1

### Details of work fields exempted from the Corporate Complaints procedure

There are four work areas exempted from the Corporate Complaints process as there are other processes and arrangements in place. The process on each of the four areas are detailed below.

1. **Care** - Due to the nature of their work there is a Statutory procedure in place for the Adult Services and Children's Services and a link to the respective procedure can be found on the Council's Corporate Complaints page.

#### [Complaints and compliments \(Social Services\)](#)

*(See below an extract from the Care Complaint procedure)*

If you are not happy with social services, please let us know.

We aim for high standards but sometimes things don't go as they should. If you contact us, we will be able to work with you to put things right as soon as possible.

You can make a comment or complaint using the contact details below:

#### **Complaints about the Adults, Health and Wellbeing Service**

- [Online form: Complaint about services for adults in Gwynedd](#)
- 01286 679549
- [gcgc@gwynedd.llyw.cymru](mailto:gcgc@gwynedd.llyw.cymru)
- Customer Care Officer, Adults, Health and Wellbeing, Cyngor Gwynedd Headquarters, Stryd y Jêl, Caernarfon, Gwynedd LL55 1SH

#### **Complaints about the Department of Children and Family Support**

- [Online form: Complaint about Cyngor Gwynedd's children's department](#)
- 01286 679151
- [gcgc@gwynedd.llyw.cymru](mailto:gcgc@gwynedd.llyw.cymru) .
- Customer Care Officer, Children and Family Support Department, Cyngor Gwynedd Headquarters, Jêl Street, Caernarfon, Gwynedd LL55 1SH

Alternatively, you can speak to any member of Social Services staff, and they will pass your concern or comment on to the appropriate Customer Care Officer.

2. **Education** - Schools have their own Complaints Procedure. Please see the link on the Welsh Government site.

<https://www.gov.wales/school-complaints-procedures-guidance-html>

3. **Employment** - Employment issues do not fall under the Corporate Complaints procedure and are rather passed on for the attention of the HR Manager.

However, staff conduct is an area covered by the Corporate Complaints Procedure. If a complaint is received about staff conduct towards a member of the public while carrying out their duties, the complaint will be passed to the relevant Manager for investigation and response and will be included in the report to Cabinet.

4. **Byw'n lach** – Complaints to Byw'n lach are dealt with by the relevant Manager or by the Director depending on the complaint, by contacting Bwy'n lach directly [cyswllt@bywniach.cymru](mailto:cyswllt@bywniach.cymru) .