

MEETING	Care Scrutiny Committee
DATE	14 July 2026
ITEM	SOCIAL SERVICES COMPLAINTS TASK AND FINISH GROUP
PURPOSE	To present the findings and recommendations of the Task and Finish Group
TASK AND FINISH GROUP CHAIR	Councillor Menna Baines
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1. **BACKGROUND**

1.1. In accordance with the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014 and the Representations Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014 that came into force on 1 August 2014, the Director of Social Services is required to produce an annual report on the way complaints are handled and investigated within the Children and Supporting Families Department and the Adults, Health and Well-being Department.

1.2 An annual report on Social Services' Complaints, Enquiries and Expressions of Gratitude (Children and Supporting Families Department and the Adults, Health and Well-being Department) was submitted to a meeting of the Care Scrutiny Committee on 25 September 2025.

The report provided:

- information on the number of complaints received by both departments
- the reasons for them along with solutions
- a summary of the lessons learnt
- the actions taken in relation to the complaints received.

1.3 Responses were received to a number of matters that were raised during the committee meeting, but some additional issues arose and it was decided to establish a task and finish group to discuss these matters further.

1.4 A brief for the work was developed and adopted on 18 December 2025 by the Care Scrutiny Committee. Five members were elected to form the task and finish group, namely Councillors Menna Baines, Elwyn Jones, Sian Williams, Angela Russell and Elin Walker Jones. The brief was

updated to include the membership, relevant officers and a timetable, and the updated brief can be found in Appendix A.

1.5 Members of the task and finish group met on 27 February 2026 to ensure:

- that members understood the complaints handling arrangements and received concise information on all complaints received during 2024-25
- a better understanding of the reasons behind individuals' choice to complain in English and whether something could be done to encourage more to complain in Welsh
- that there was adequate support in terms of safeguarding for staff dealing with persistent complainants.

1.6 The group wished to thank all officers and teams for their work in this field.

2. TASK AND FINISH GROUP DISCUSSIONS

2.1 Papers were submitted prior to the meeting held on 27 February. There was an opportunity to receive an overview of the complaints procedure, further information about complaints to the two departments concerned, the complaint recording form, and the persistent complainant policy. All members were also given the opportunity to ask questions of the officers.

2.2 Overview of the complaints' procedure

2.2.1 It was reported that the two departments concerned followed the Welsh Government's national guidance on concerns and complaints policies. It was reiterated that these had been included in the agenda and any questions or observations from members were welcomed.

2.2.2 Members noted that the additional background information was useful but expressed surprise that the guidance had not been updated by the Welsh Government since 2014. It was noted that there had been many developments since its publication in 2014, such as the increasing use of social media, and that the guidance should reflect the world as it was now. It was suggested that the Welsh Government should be asked to provide more up-to-date and current guidance. It was also added that consideration should be given to adding publication dates to the Council's policy documentation.

2.2.3 Members were of the opinion that complaints should be welcomed because they led to learning and to improving provision. Officers added that the work of supporting and protecting

the public was emotional work that was often associated with dissatisfaction and discontent, and therefore naturally led to receiving some complaints for various reasons.

- 2.2.4 It was explained that formal and informal complaints were submitted for a variety of reasons, and that complaints officers interpreted and distinguished between complaints in order to determine which process was most appropriate for a particular complaint. It was confirmed that many cases could be resolved immediately and verbally by officers and managers, which often reduced the number of cases that developed into formal complaints. It was noted that complaints resolved within 24 hours were not recorded as a formal complaint.

2.3 Complaints

2.3.1 General

It was confirmed that approximately 26 complaints were normally received through the complaints process each year. Members were reminded that it should be borne in mind that this figure did not reflect every concern that had arisen during the year. On average, around 25 complaints were usually received per year.

- 2.3.2 The complaints were looked at in terms of themes and it was discussed whether specific themes emerged. It was concluded that there were no specific themes and that was confirmed by officers. The officers reiterated that many complaints were submitted at random and did not follow a pattern. Members were assured that if any patterns or trends emerged, the complaint received due attention and was referred to the Assistant Head of Department for careful monitoring.

2.3.2 Complaints to the Adults, Health and Well-being Department

An overview of the complaints received by the Adults, Health and Well-being Department was provided, and consideration was given to the nature of the complaints and the manner in which they were resolved by the Council. The appropriate process involved in resolving the complaints and correspondence with complainants was explained. It was noted that complaints were lodged at various levels, in different locations within the department. There was a reminder that some complaints are submitted verbally, which were resolved immediately by Managers, and that the complaints would not proceed to be resolved through a formal process.

2.3.3 Members suggested that it would be useful for the two departments to reconcile the way information about complaints was presented and to include a column to reflect the lessons learnt in each case. The officers confirmed that this could be done in the future.

2.3.4 Complaints to the Children and Supporting Families Department

An overview of the complaints received by the Children and Supporting Families Department was provided, and consideration was given to the nature of the complaints and the manner in which they were resolved by the Council. It was explained that the process was the same in both departments.

2.3.5 It was asked whether there was any link between the work streams of the Our Bravery Brought Justice report response programme and the complaints protocol and policies. In response, it was explained that child safeguarding issues and allegations were different to complaints, therefore the complaints policy did not apply directly in such cases. It was explained that different processes were followed in this situation because a complaint was different to an allegation. The manner in which a complaint could be distinguished from an allegation was considered, and it was said that matters were interpreted and referred to the appropriate place by the relevant Officers. The child protection guidelines and arrangements were focused upon in detail, setting out the appropriate and suitable processes.

2.4 Complaint recording form and the language of the complaint

2.4.1 It was confirmed that forms to complain and praise were available at Siop Gwynedd, on the Council's website and in packs from social workers. The efficiency and accessibility of the complaint recording forms for the two departments concerned and the corporate complaint form were discussed. Consideration was given as to why more people in Gwynedd submitted complaints in English. It was explained that officers responded to individuals who submitted a complaint in the complainant's preferred language after consultation with them.

2.4.2 Officers stated that they anticipated more complaints through the medium of English, with the increasing use of artificial intelligence. It was elaborated that some complaints were clearly already formulated with the help of artificial intelligence and tended to be more complex to answer. It was explained that this caused an additional challenge for officers, and could be time-consuming.

2.4.3 The use of clear Welsh in the Social Services complaint forms was praised. The officers explained that they had attended 'Easy Read' training to ensure that the form was easy for everyone to understand. It was suggested that it would be better to simplify the language in the Corporate Services complaint form in order to increase its accessibility and make it easier to read for everyone. It was noted that the use of clear Welsh in the forms would increase the number of people complaining through the medium of Welsh, and therefore would increase the use of Welsh.

2.4.4 One member suggested that consideration should also be given to adding information on how to get in contact through the Council's social media. Other members supported this.

2.4.5 On a positive note, it was reported that departments received far more thanks than complaints, which was extremely encouraging.

2.5 Persistent Complainant Policy – Unacceptable Behaviour

2.5.1 There was a discussion on the persistent complainant policy and the number of instances of unacceptable behaviour that arose. This policy was confirmed to be a general policy across the Council and applicable to all departments. It was noted that the Council was reluctant to implement this procedure, and would not act unless absolutely necessary. It was explained that complainants usually reached the threshold after months or years of vexatious complaining and caused frustration to employees and significantly increased their workload. It was confirmed that there were not many cases at present.

2.5.2 The importance of protecting staff in such situations where unacceptable behaviour arose was emphasised. It was confirmed that risk assessments were in place to protect workers, and that a specific process had to be followed to ensure that employees felt safe and comfortable at work. Reference was made to the Staff Safety Register, stating that staff safety was a priority. Staff were asked if they felt they had adequate support and supervision. It was confirmed that staff in both departments felt that they received very good support and were happy in their work.

2.5.3 The officers were thanked for their work in putting the papers together and their willingness to discuss the matter openly and constructively.

3. THE FINDINGS OF THE TASK AND FINISH GROUP

3.1 A closer look at the complaints system and the complaints received was beneficial for members to:

- improve understanding of the arrangements in place to deal with complaints in Cyngor Gwynedd and the national guidance and guidelines
- receive concise information about all complaints received during 2024-25 and understand the reasons behind individuals' opting to complain in English and the need to deal with complaints in the complainant's preferred language
- examine the policy for dealing with persistent complainants and unacceptable behaviour.

3.2 It was assured that there were robust and suitable arrangements in place to deal with complaints in the two departments concerned and that they followed national guidance. However, concern was expressed that the national guidance had not been updated by the Welsh Government since 2014 and that social media was not covered in them.

3.3 It was concluded that no obvious pattern or theme appeared in the complaints received during 2023-24. Assurance was also given that where a complaint highlighted a shortcoming within a service, appropriate action was being taken by the departments to address this which included monitoring arrangements. It was suggested that one standard template should be used by both departments to report complaints.

3.4 The style of communication and language used in the complaint forms was praised by both departments. It was suggested that the language used in the Corporate complaint form should be simplified to increase its accessibility and make it easier to read for all. It was also suggested that social media should be used to highlight how to lodge a complaint or praise a service and provide a link to the complaint forms in the message. It was confirmed that staff consulted the public about their preferred language when corresponding about a complaint.

3.5 Assurances were received that the persistent complainant policy was in place and that appropriate support was available to staff.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE TASK AND FINISH GROUP

4.1 Although assurance had been received that the complaints procedure was effective, it was believed that the following recommendations should be implemented in order to encourage more residents to submit complaints and praise, and some through the medium of Welsh.

4.2 Recommendation 1

To ask the Cabinet Member for Children and Supporting Families and the Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Well-being to correspond with the Welsh Government to express concern that guidance on handling complaints has not been updated since 2014 and that social media is not properly addressed as a means for complainants to submit complaints.

4.3 Recommendation 2

To reconcile the information presented in tables in future social services complaints reports to reflect the situation in a comprehensive and up-to-date manner.

4.4 Recommendation 3

To recommend that the relevant Cabinet Member reviews the corporate complaints recording form and its format and amend it to be more similar to Social Services complaints recording forms in order to promote and increase the accessibility of Welsh-language forms.

4.5 Recommendation 4

To ask departments dealing with complaints to note on the complaint recording forms that the Council can be contacted via social media.

4.6 The Committee is asked to consider the findings and recommendations of the Task and Finish Group.