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CEREDIGION
County Council

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12 October 2023

Dwynwen Jones

01545 572070

Dear Sir / Madam

I write to inform you that a Meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be held at the HYBRID - NEUADD CYNGOR CEREDIGION, PENMORFA, ABERAERON / REMOTELY VIA VIDEO CONFERENCE on Thursday, 19 October 2023 at 10.00 am for the transaction of the following business:

1. **To elect a Vice-Chairman for the remainder of the 2023.2024 municipal year with immediate effect**
2. **Apologies and Personal Matters**
3. **Disclosures of personal interest (including whipping declarations) Members are reminded of their personal responsibility to declare any personal and prejudicial interest in respect of matters contained in this agenda in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000, the Council's Constitution and the Members Code of Conduct. In addition, Members must declare any prohibited party whip which the Member has been given in relation to the meeting as per the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011.**
4. **Tackling Hardship Strategy Annual Report 2022.2023 (Pages 3 - 22)**
5. **Annual Report of Compliments, Complaints and Freedom of Information reports 2022.2023 (Pages 23 - 62)**
6. **Update on the Banking Services Contract (Pages 63 - 64)**
7. **To consider the Committee's Forward Work Programme (Pages 65 - 70)**
8. **To confirm minutes of the previous meeting and to consider any matters arising from those Minutes. (Pages 71 - 78)**

Members are reminded to sign the Attendance Register

A Translation Services will be provided at this meeting and those present are welcome to speak in Welsh or English at the meeting.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L Edwards', written in a cursive style.

Miss Lowri Edwards
Corporate Lead Officer: Democratic Services

To: Chairman and Members of Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The remaining Members of the Council for information only.

CYNGOR SIR CEREDIGION COUNTY COUNCIL

Report to: Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 19/10/23

Title: Tackling Hardship Strategy Annual Report 2022-23

Purpose of the report: To present an update on the progress of Ceredigion Public Services Board's Tackling Hardship Strategy 2020-23

Reason Scrutiny have requested the information:

To monitor progress made to address the effects of poverty on Ceredigion residents.

Background

This report sets out the steps taken by Ceredigion Public Services Board (PSB) to provide a coordinated response to the increased risk of hardship in Ceredigion.

This is the last report of our stand alone 'Tackling Poverty Strategy'. Going forward, it has been agreed that the PSB Poverty sub-group will ensure that combating poverty is maintained as a cross-cutting issue across all areas of work undertaken to deliver Ceredigion PSB's Local Well-being Plan 2023-28. A workplan is currently being developed to help us achieve this.

The three key objectives of Ceredigion Tackling Hardship Strategy 2020- 2023 were:

1. To develop a shared understanding with partner agencies of the evolving impact of COVID-19 on hardship in Ceredigion through the collation and analysis of data.
2. To co-ordinate and consolidate collaborative efforts with partner agencies in order to promote and take advantage of all available help and assistance
3. To identify gaps in support and evolving hardship needs in order to develop early effective intervention that will strengthen individual and community resilience as we adjust to the impact of COVID-19.

Current Situation

We have achieved the objectives of the strategy. The Poverty sub-group has met regularly and discussed a wide range of issues to help us understand the impact of hardship on Ceredigion citizens. The data dashboards that were developed to support this work are widely used by partners and have been recognised across Wales as an example of good practice.

The Tackling Hardship action plan and regular reporting has helped us to coordinate our actions.

The Cost-of-Living webpage on the Council website and the Cost-of-Living leaflet, which was posted to all Ceredigion postcodes in winter 2022, has helped to promote the available help and assistance. Gaps in support have been identified and, while

we were unable to address all these gaps, we have been able to respond to some, for example the network of 54 Warm Welcome Spaces that offered a warm and friendly place for communities to come together during winter 2022.

The full report for the period March 2022 – April 2023 is attached.

Wellbeing of Future Generations:

Has an Integrated Impact Assessment been completed? If, not, please state why.

No, this is a progress report and does not involve a change of policy or service.

Summary of Integrated Impact Assessment:

Long term:	Not applicable
Collaboration:	Not applicable
Involvement:	Not applicable
Prevention:	Not applicable
Integration:	Not applicable

Recommendation(s):

To receive and endorse the Tackling Hardship Annual Report 2022-23

Reasons for decision:

The report is an accurate description of progress made by the Public Services Board to tackle the effect of poverty on residents of Ceredigion.

Contact Name: Cathryn Morgan

Designation: Equalities and Inclusion manager

Date of Report: 27/09/2023

Acronyms:



CEREDIGION TACKLING HARDSHIP STRATEGY 2020 - 2023

PROGRESS REPORT MARCH 2023

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Introduction

This report sets out the steps taken by Ceredigion Public Services Board (PSB) to tackle hardship in Ceredigion due to the impact of Covid-19 and, more recently, the increased cost of living. It outlines the work that Ceredigion PSB Poverty sub-group has delivered in 2022-23 to maximise support for those who are experiencing hardship.

This is the last annual report on the [Tackling Hardship Strategy 2020-23](#). From April 2023, tackling hardship in Ceredigion is a cross-cutting theme of Ceredigion PSB's Local Well-being Plan 2023-28. This new approach will enable a focus on poverty to be embedded in all aspects of the PSB's work programme for the next five years.

Three key objectives of Ceredigion Tackling Hardship Strategy are:

- To develop a **shared understanding** with partner agencies of the evolving impact of COVID-19 on hardship in Ceredigion through the collation and analysis of data.
- To co-ordinate and **consolidate collaborative efforts** with partner agencies in order to promote and take advantage of all available help and assistance.
- To **identify gaps** in support and evolving hardship needs in order to develop early effective intervention that will strengthen individual and community resilience as we adjust to the impact of COVID-19.

An action plan is being delivered by a range of partners and public sector teams, listed at Appendix B. The Action Plan is divided into 3 separate pillars for implementation:



We wish to acknowledge the commitment and support that colleagues and partners have demonstrated and thank them for their continued recognition of the importance of working collectively to tackle hardship in Ceredigion.

The Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010

Section 2 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 puts a statutory duty on Welsh authorities to prepare and publish a strategy that will contribute to the eradication of child poverty in Wales. The broad aims for contributing to the eradication of poverty are:

- to increase income for households with children.
- to ensure that children are not materially deprived.
- to promote and facilitate paid employment for parents of children.
- to provide parents of children with the skills necessary for paid employment.
- to reduce inequalities in educational attainment between children.
- to support parenting of children.
- to reduce inequalities in health between children and between parents of children.
- to ensure that all children grow up in decent housing.
- to ensure that all children grow up in safe and cohesive communities.
- to reduce inequalities in participation in cultural, sporting and leisure activities between children and between parents of children.
- to help young people participate effectively in education and training.
- to help young people take advantage of opportunities for employment.
- to help young people participate effectively and responsibly in the life of their communities.

The Tackling Hardship Strategy aims to address these aims. Progress is monitored by the Ceredigion PSB Poverty Sub-group which meets four times per year.

Matters relating to Child Poverty are scrutinised by the Children & Young People Services Provider Forum that meets one week before the PSB Poverty Sub-group in order that issues can be escalated to the Poverty Sub-group immediately.

Pillar 1: Essential Living Costs

Financial support was offered directly to families and individuals who were struggling. This included some support with training and employment, but the main focus was to make sure that people received the help that they are entitled to, in face of the rising cost of living. The section below provides examples of some of this work.

Porth Cymorth Cynnar: Early Intervention service

The Carers and Community support team worked with 3,171 people in 2022-23. Extra Community Connector 'drop ins' were offered in more places across the County so that more people were able to access advice and support.

300 door draught excluders, 1,500 metres of heat reflective radiator foil, 60 energy saving long life bulbs, 50 blankets and 900 packs of seeds were distributed by the Community Connectors.

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction Scheme

19 days was the average speed of processing new claims for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction scheme. 5,482 people are currently in receipt of these benefits.

7,547 Winter Fuel Scheme payments and 21,367 Cost of Living scheme payments were made to households, totalling £4.7 million. £322,971 worth of Discretionary Housing Payments were made to top up rents and help safeguard tenancies during 2022-23.

Porth Gofal: Housing Services

12% of those approaching the Homelessness team cited 'Financial Concerns' as one of their reasons for requiring assistance. 67% of households supported by the team were successfully prevented from becoming homeless.

The ECO4 scheme, aimed at low income, vulnerable and fuel poor households living in energy inefficient properties, was launched in October 2022.

A substantial increase in the budget to deliver affordable social housing is coupled with difficulties in acquiring contractors to undertake the work. There are also concerns that the impact of phosphates in the river Teifi will put new planning applications on hold.

Care Society

Inflation and energy prices are creating new worries for vulnerable tenants needing support. People's lack of awareness of cost-of-living support schemes is a major issue. An acute lack of affordable accommodation in Ceredigion is creating problems for service users looking for options when leaving temporary or emergency accommodation. The new Renting Homes Act legislation has further complicated these issues.

Area 43

Area 43's Youth Café – Depot - is now open in Cardigan where young people can access subsidised food and refreshments. Paid employment placements are available as well as free training for 14–25-year-olds in food preparation, nutrition, food hygiene courses and personal and social education in a live work environment.

Young People can access virtual and face-to-face support with budgeting, help to maximise their income, signposting to specialised services, support with applications for hardship grants, independent living skills and securing employment. 399 young people facing financial hardship were supported in 2022-23.

Ceredigion Family Centre Network

860 families were supported by Ceredigion's network of Family Centres. 188 families were referred for further help with free Baby Bundles, clothing, food and book parcels, NEST warm home scheme, Women's Aid, Home Start, Citizens Advice, Dŵr Cymru, CREDU Carers, Team around the Family, Health Visitor support and Mind.

Warm Welcome Spaces were held in all six centres with hot food/snacks provided. 177 families benefitted from this as well as others from the wider community.

Schools

An [Equity and Deprivation Strategy](#) was approved by Cabinet in February 2023. This offers guidance for schools supporting disadvantaged young people and sits alongside a body of wider work to better support our more disadvantaged learners. There is a key message at its core – disadvantaged learners need more support, more often, to have the same opportunities as their peers.

Childcare

The current situation continues to impact on the sector. Energy costs are high and there is still no after school club provision in Penparcau and Cardigan due to recruitment issues; this is crucial for parents wishing to access employment and training. The number of registered childcare places reduced by 158 over the last 12 months.

However, free childcare is available for 2-4-year-olds in Flying Start areas and these will now be extended to more areas. 90 additional children benefitted from Flying Start Outreach provision and 354 children benefitted from the Childcare Offer.

Training and Employment

Lifelong Learning and Skills, the Youth Service, Careers Wales and Job Centre Plus are all members of the NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) panel. Taster sessions were offered in placements such as carpentry, mechanics, hairdressing, beauty, plumbing. 64% of learners supported by Porth Cymorth Cynnar gained qualifications in traineeships and 70% of learners gained qualifications in apprenticeships.

Jobcentre services are now fully operational with Work Coaches offering face-to-face support in all sites.

Citizens Advice

One-to-one appointments for clients seeking detailed advice via phone and video calls continue. In-person appointments are available in Borth, Aberystwyth, Penparcau, Lampeter and Cardigan.

Following a successful bid to the National Lottery, Citizens Advice increased their face-to-face delivery at venues across the county including, where facilities allow, regular drop-in sessions as well as bespoke events for community groups and a cost-of-living zoom drop-in via their website. They would like to be able to offer support via video conferencing to vulnerable housebound clients but have not yet been able to do this since the clients need help at their end and this is not available.

Age Cymru Dyfed

Two part time Information and Advice officers, based in Aberystwyth, offer support and advice on eligibility and accessing welfare benefits. They also offer a specific Dementia Support Service which can be accessed via the Council's Housing Support Service. Appointments are offered in the office, virtually and by telephone. In exceptional circumstances, home visits are arranged. Staff find that the generation they support do not speak up or complain but urgently need their help to live comfortable and fulfilling lives.

Since April 2022 the team have dealt with over 690 referrals and assisted Ceredigion residents to access nearly £760, 000 of unclaimed Welfare Support.

Pillar 2: Physical and Emotional Wellbeing

Physical and emotional wellbeing support was offered to families and individuals who may be experiencing stress, exhaustion, and anxiety. This included preventative actions, like exercise classes, community get-togethers, respite for unpaid Carers and counselling, as well as long-term planning for future provision.

Ceredigion Family Centre Network

860 families enjoyed a range of activities aimed at improving physical and emotional wellbeing. These included messy play, sensory play, zumbini, cooking sessions, gardening, intergenerational gatherings, community art, theatre school, outdoor play, arts and crafts and barbecues. Staff are trained in Safeguarding, Suicide Awareness and Mental Health 1st Aid.

DASH Ceredigion

DASH offer childcare and play opportunities for disabled children/young people and respite for families. The lack of out of school childcare provision led to a big decline in use of their support during the pandemic. School holiday playschemes and

weekends away are now up and running but requests from out of school clubs for 'helping hand' support via the Ymuno scheme remain low.

Porth Cymorth Cynnar: Support and Prevention

Young people aged 16+ were offered 88 workshops, for example volunteering in the community, indoor bowling, gardening and Welsh culture and heritage discovery.

125 young people that worked with a youth worker demonstrated an improvement to their wellbeing and confidence, for example, a young person unwilling to leave the house who went on a wellbeing walk with a youth worker.

The mobile youth provision engaged with 10 communities and 176 young people. Free weekly football sessions were delivered with Dyfed-Powys Police and Swansea Football Foundation, one young person has been nominated as a young ambassador due to his commitment.

Area 43

North and South Ceredigion GP Clusters commissioned Area 43 to provide a counselling service to young people aged 13-30. 193 Young People (N. Ceredigion) and 6 Young People (S. Ceredigion) accessed the service during 2022-23. This service is no longer funded and has stopped.

Area 43 also provided an emotional support service to 57 young people from their Cardigan Centre.

Porth Cymorth Cynnar, Well-being Centres

The National Exercise Referral Service (NERS) is now very busy - 1,011 referrals were received in 2022-23. All referrals are followed up, although not all residents decide to start the intervention. 343 clients completed the 16-week programme during the year.

The NERS is one of a range of health intervention classes and activities, including Fit4Life and Wellbeing Walks. 424 classes and activities were offered each month in North, Mid and South of the county. All programmes are popular and well received by clients across Ceredigion.

Porth Gofal

The Occupational Therapy team hoped to be able to carry out more assessments to provide appropriate equipment and therapy support for people. This reduces pressure on the unpaid Carer as the Cared for becomes more independent. However, the service is experiencing significant staffing challenges which has resulted in a waiting list.

Hywel Dda University Health Board and Porth Cymorth Cynnar: Carer support

The Carers and Community Support team responded to 3,538 enquiries. These included requests for support, applications for Welsh Government unpaid carers low-

income payment and Ceredigion Carers cards enabling unpaid carers to have access to free membership of leisure centres and discounts across Ceredigion.

The team also dealt with 621 applications for the Carers fund. 1,970 unpaid Carers were registered with the Carers Information Service in March 2023.

Porth Cynnal – Mental Health & Substance Misuse Services

Approved Mental Health Practitioner capacity has increased but the social work team is not yet at full capacity. School counselling capacity has increased but demand is high. The Substance Misuse team has also grown with 2 new workers now targeting homelessness and co-recurring issues. Substance misuse and mental health teams will be integrated from 1st April 2023.

Policy and Performance

Ceredigion's Assessment of Local Wellbeing was published in August 2022. The Assessment has told us a lot about the social, economic, cultural, and environmental well-being of people and communities in Ceredigion. It will be used to inform the next Local Well-being Plan 2023-28 and can be referenced by organisations when preparing bids for funding or demonstrating a need to focus on specific areas.

Penparcau Community Forum

The Hub is working on recruiting more volunteers to help with distribution of food parcels and for wider activities like gardening and litter picking. During the pandemic, food parcels were being delivered daily, now down to weekly deliveries. They also offer a Meals on Wheels service. The continued contact helps the coordinator really get to know people.

Some people continue to feel isolated, and some are not eating properly or don't have the facility to cook. A consultation was run in January/February to help review the services offered; this will feed into a new funding application which will probably focus on mental wellbeing and combatting isolation.

Coleg Ceredigion

Learners can access a range of personal support services, including mentoring, counselling, and access to 24/7 support. The on-line systems for personal support are now embedded into the evolving college programme to promote learner well-being.

Age Cymru Dyfed

The Befriending Life Links and Veteran Support services offer support to those who are experiencing loneliness and isolation. Befriending Life Links helps people to build confidence and re-join their communities, they also initiate local Social Groups and then step back once they are established. Veteran support officers offer one to one support for elderly veterans across the county.

Pillar 3: Community Resilience

2022-23 saw more of a 'return to normality' after Covid as services returned to mainly face-to-face support. However, there is now increased reliance on digital connectivity and not everyone can access this. The section below highlights some of the work undertaken to ensure that people can access the services that they need.

Porth Cymorth Cynnar, Early Intervention and CAVO

Lists of community support covering the whole county were developed during the pandemic to help identify areas that lacked support. The range of support offered changes quickly and people are now encouraged to use Dewis Cymru and Infoengine to promote the support available. In March 2023 there were 543 registered Dewis users in Ceredigion and 607 resources that covered the County.

There are 6 food banks and 2 food surplus groups in Ceredigion covering 98.9% of residential properties. Community Council wards not covered by food banks are Llandyfriog, Llanddewi Brefi, Tregaron and Ystrad Fflur. The food banks were able to cope with increasing demand during the year but are struggling to recruit volunteers.

Ceredigion Council Customer Contact

Ceredigion libraries are now fully re-opened, and the mobile library is back on the road. There are plans to provide access to I-pads on all mobile library vans, but these are not yet available. Face to face customer service sites re-opened in January 2023 for 5 days a week, at a slightly later opening time. At the end of March 2023 there was no facility to receive cash payments face to face in Council offices, however, residents were able to continue to make cash payments at all Post Offices and in Payzone shops.

Ceredigion Family Centre Network

Although some rural areas are still in need of better internet speeds and reliable phone coverage, none have been identified as being without internet at all. Services have now moved to face to face delivery, but social media continues to be an important aspect of communication. Families are engaging well with this and keep in touch with each other via groups chats, providing good peer support and also accessing staff support through individual messages.

All staff are continually developing new digital skills, and some have accessed formal training to increase their knowledge in this area.

Hywel Dda Health Board: Partnerships, Diversity and Inclusion

The Community Outreach team engaged with 5,259 people. Over 50% of conversations were about prevention and wellbeing and referrals to smoking cessation, nutrition advice and accessing screening services. The team engaged with 538 Ukrainian refugees, 229 Gypsies, Roma or Travellers and 370 people who were homeless or in a vulnerable situation at home.

They also worked with community groups to set up local wellbeing walks for our diverse communities to encourage exercise, create friendships and engage with the health board in an informal way – 164 people have taken part throughout the year

Porth Cymorth Cynnar: Community Well-being & Learning

Dysgu Bro is delivering courses in more community venues, including Bronant, Rhydypennau, Cwmystwyth and Devil's Bridge. Many of the sessions are free. IT equipment is offered to all new learners.

Care Society

Care Society are working with Digital Communities Wales/CWMPAS with the aim of addressing local digital exclusion and improving digital confidence through essential skills training and online safety sessions. Connectivity is still a problem but the development of hubs, like Lampeter's Canolfan Dulais Enterprise Centre, where people can utilise computers and get online is helping.

Penparcau Community Forum

A few people go into the Hub in Penparcau to use the free Wi-Fi or to ask for help with phones and tablets. The Forum work with Age Cymru Dyfed who loan tablets to those who need them and offer 'getting online advice'; the Forum provides the venue and promotes the service for them.

Age Cymru Dyfed

Through funding from CAVO, and more recently the Santander Foundation, the team works with partners like Penparcau Hub to get people online, learn digital skills and, through Santander, access online banking/shopping and price comparison services. The support is offered by staff and a team of dedicated volunteers via telephone, virtually, through home visits and group activities.

Mid Wales Growth - Digital Development

Levels of broadband connectivity in Mid Wales have improved over the past 12 months, but the overall level of connectivity is still lower than some parts of Wales and the UK. Approximately 90% of premises in Mid Wales have the capability to connect to Superfast Broadband (30Mbps+), lower than that for Wales (97.1%) and the UK (97.6%) on average.

The Mid Wales region has seen an increase in those able to receive higher speeds with approximately 40% of the region now having access to Ultrafast Broadband (100mbps+), though this still falls behind both the Wales and UK average at 63.2% and 76.25% respectively.

7% of premises in Mid Wales cannot access a connection of more than 10Mbps compared to 2% for Wales and 1.8% for the UK. This is largely because Openreach was the main provider of broadband infrastructure services and they have

concentrated on fibre services. Other areas have seen various providers offering alternative technologies such as fixed wireless access (FWA), that can overcome the challenges of providing greater speeds. Providers are now engaging with Council teams around the deployment of FWA connections which could have a significant positive impact on broadband connectivity.

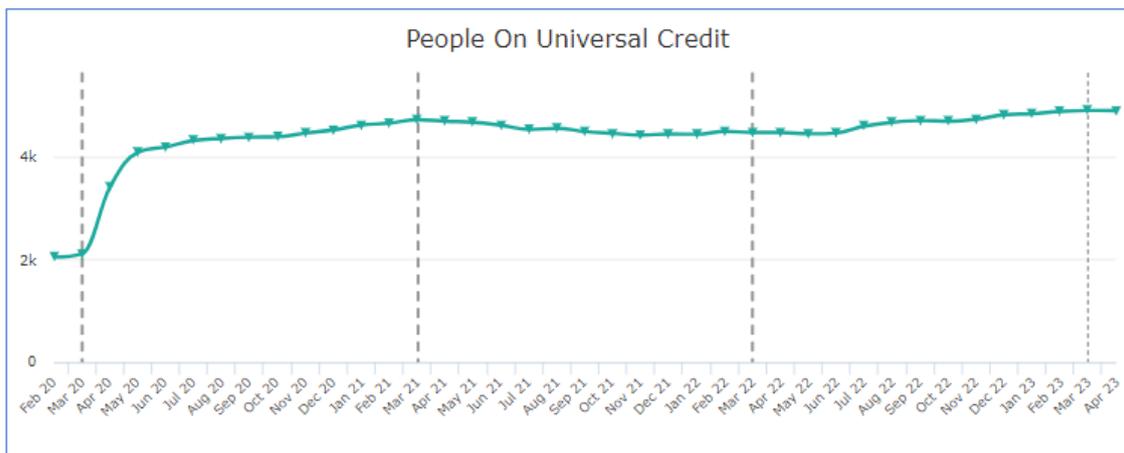
Despite this, Mid Wales currently has 40% coverage of Fibre to the Premises (FTTP), allowing download speeds of up to 1gbps (1000mbps), which again is lower than the Wales average of 47%, but greater than several of the more rural Local Authority, with the more densely populated Local Authorities receiving greater speeds (i.e Cardiff has 68% coverage).

Mobile coverage also lags behind the Wales and UK average coverage with topography and the lower density of population posing particular challenges. Approximately 9% of premises within the region have no 4G services while only 51% of premises have 4G coverage from all four operators, this in comparison to an average 73% in Wales and 80% across the UK.

What the Data tells us - did we make a difference?

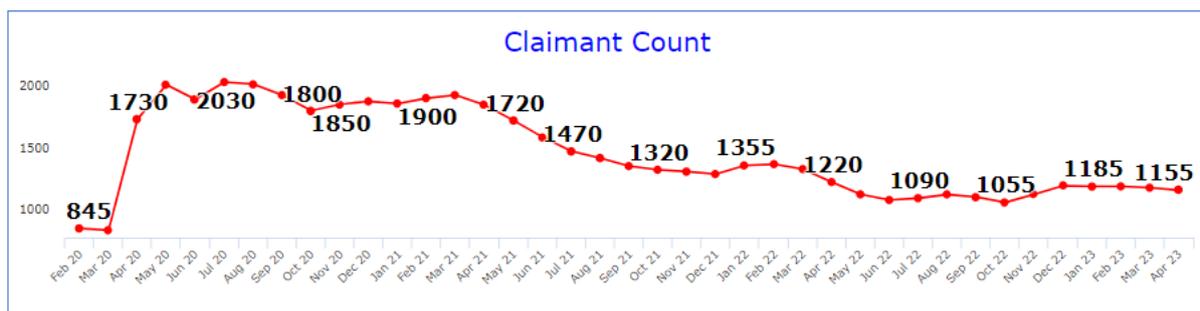
A lot of support has been provided over the past 12 months. We must however rely on hard data to tell us if we are making a difference. Our data dashboards help the PSB Poverty sub-group to monitor the efficacy of the support provided. These capture live data from websites such as DWP and Office for National Statistics and were developed further during 2022-23.

Universal Credit



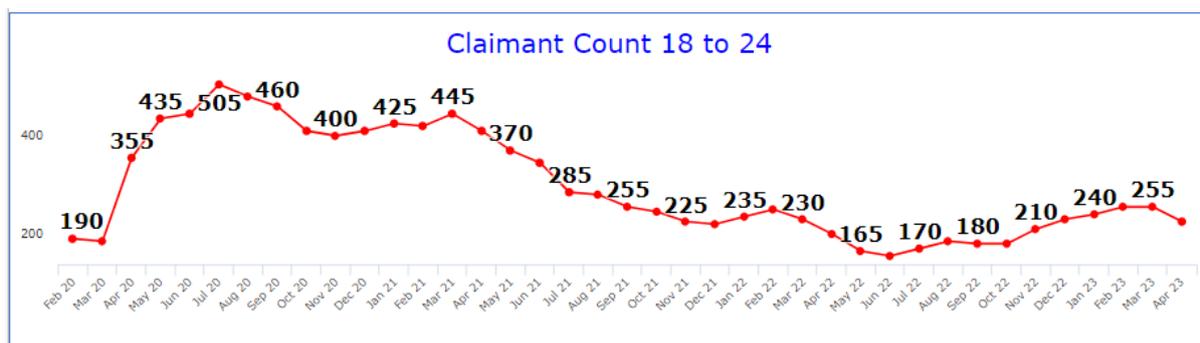
The number of people on Universal Credit in Ceredigion saw a sharp increase in March/April 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic. They started to level around the 4,500 mark between July 2021 and July 2022 but then started to increase. The figure at March 2023 was 132% higher than at March 2020.

Claimant Count



The Claimant Count is a measure of the number of people claiming benefits principally for the reason of being unemployed. This figure also increased from March/April 2020. Although it hadn't returned to pre-pandemic levels by March 2023, it was just 42% higher than in March 2020. This implies that although people are now working, they are still eligible for Universal Credit. It's likely that this is due to in-work poverty.

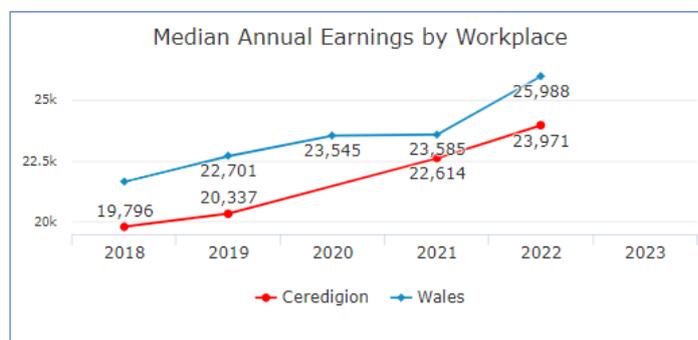
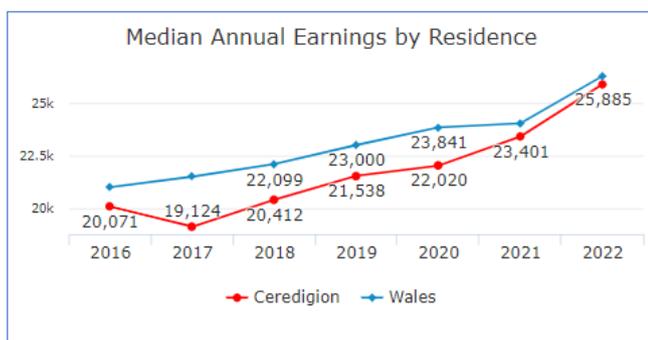
Youth Employment



The impact of Covid on young people has been of particular concern and we monitor the number of 18–24-year-old claimants. This cohort was following the same trend as the overall claimant count and started to show a faster recovery rate in June 2022. However, figures started to increase and in March 2023 there were 255 claimants aged 18-24, 38% higher than pre-pandemic rates.

Median Annual Earnings by Residence and by Workplace

The average earnings gap between people who live in Ceredigion and people who live in the rest of Wales appears to be narrowing. However, the average earnings gap between Ceredigion and the rest of Wales by workplace has not. This trend will be explored further.



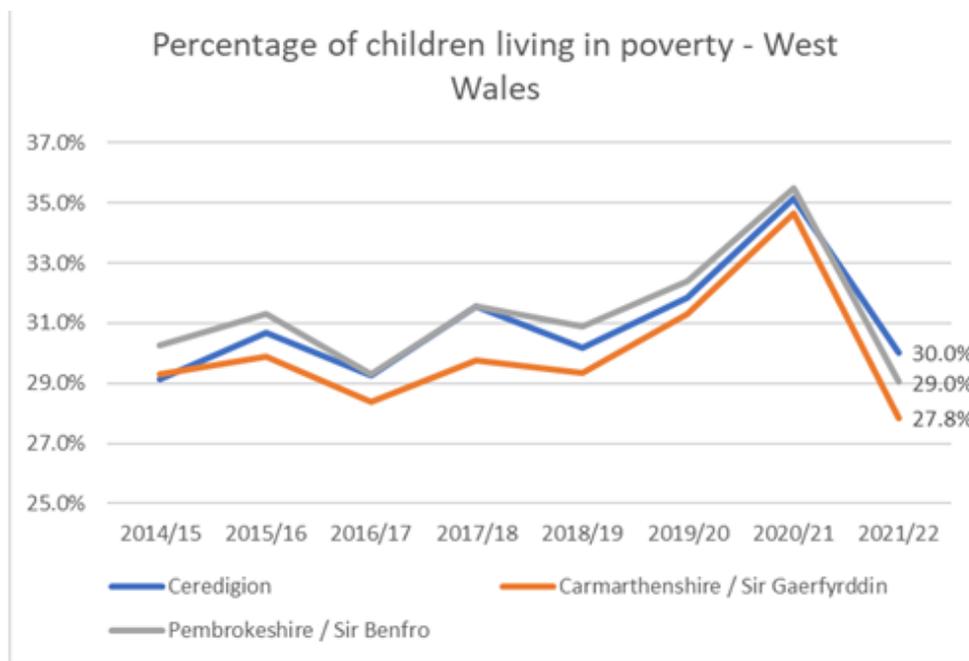
Physical and Emotional Wellbeing

The average healthy life expectancy for Males in Ceredigion is 68 years, and for Females it is 70 years. The gap in life expectancy between the most and least deprived areas in Ceredigion is 10.2 years for Males and 11.8 years for Females. Cardigan Teifi and Rhyd y Fwch areas are the most deprived in Ceredigion.

It is more difficult to measure impact on well-being locally. Since March 2020, the Welsh Government funded a survey of public views on the coronavirus (Covid 19). One of the questions asked was how concerned people were about being able to pay their bills one month from now. This survey ended in May 2022, and it would be useful to identify another method of measuring how happy people are in Ceredigion.

Child Poverty

Finally, 2021-22 child poverty figures for Ceredigion showed a big decrease from their high in 2020-21. Nevertheless, 30% of children in Ceredigion were living in poverty in 2021-22. 2022-23 figures are not yet available, and these will show the impact of the cost-of-living crisis. It is very likely that we will see an increase.



Using data in this way is an ongoing journey. As we research more into the causes and impacts of poverty, our level of understanding of the issues affecting Ceredigion continue to increase.

This can be seen in the work around digital exclusion which has also been highlighted on a national level by Audit Wales, Digital Communities Wales and others.

This means that we can target our activities to where they are most needed and where they will have the biggest impact.

Conclusion and Ongoing Challenges

Inflation and energy prices are creating new worries for vulnerable tenants. People's lack of awareness of cost-of-living support schemes is a big issue.

An acute lack of affordable accommodation in Ceredigion is creating problems. The new Renting Homes Act legislation has further complicated these issues.

A substantial increase in the budget to deliver affordable social housing is coupled with difficulties in acquiring contractors to undertake the work. There are concerns that the impact of phosphates in the river Teifi could put new planning applications on hold.

The childcare sector continues to struggle with the cost of heating and with recruitment. The number of childcare places has dropped again. This impacts on people's ability to access work and training.

Food banks cover 98.9% of residential properties in Ceredigion. They coped with increasing demand during the year but are struggling to recruit volunteers.

It's likely that in-work poverty remains an issue because the number of people in receipt of Universal Credit remains high, but the number of people claiming benefits for the reason of being unemployed has reduced.

The average earnings gap between people who live in Ceredigion and people who live in the rest of Wales has narrowed. However, the average earnings gap between people who work in Ceredigion and people who work in the rest of Wales has not.

Child Poverty rates have decreased but remain very high, at 30% in 2021-22. The 2022-23 figures have not yet been published and these will show the true impact of the increased cost of living.

Levels of broadband connectivity in Mid Wales are improving but little has changed in terms of mobile phone coverage. The Mid-Wales area lags behind the rest of Wales and the UK in terms of both these methods of communication.

Next Steps

1. Continue to develop the data dashboards to ensure we have a shared understanding of the evolving impact of hardship in Ceredigion through the collation and analysis of data.
2. The PSB Poverty sub-group will develop a workplan which ensures that combating poverty is maintained as a cross-cutting issue across all areas of work undertaken to deliver Ceredigion PSB's Local Well-being Plan 2023-28

Appendix A: Contributing Partners

- Hywel Dda University Health Board, Partnerships, Diversity & Inclusion
- Ceredigion County Council, Porth Cymorth Cynnar, Community Wellbeing & Learning
- Ceredigion County Council, Finance & Procurement
- Area 43
- Ceredigion County Council, Porth Cynnal
- Plant Dewi, Family Centre Network (Borth, Llandysul, Aberaeron, Cardigan, Lampeter and Tregaron)
- Ceredigion County Council, Porth Gofal
- Cymdeithas Gofal The Care Society
- Ceredigion County Council, Policy, Performance & Public Protection
- Ceredigion County Council, Economy & Regeneration
- Ceredigion County Council, Schools & Lifelong Learning
- Ceredigion County Council, Customer Contact
- Ceredigion County Council, Highways & Environmental Services
- DASH (Disability and Self-Help)
- Department of Work & Pensions (DWP)
- Coleg Ceredigion
- Ceredigion Citizens Advice
- Penparcau Community Forum
- Ceredigion Association of Voluntary Organisations (CAVO)
- Age Cymru Dyfed
- Aberystwyth University

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CYNGOR SIR CEREDIGION COUNTY COUNCIL

Report to: Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 19th October 2023

Title: Annual Report of Compliments, Complaints, and Freedom of Information (2022-2023)

Purpose of the report: To provide the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a comprehensive overview of the Compliments, Complaints and Freedom of Information (FOI) activity (including Environmental Information Regulations - EIR) received by the Local Authority between 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2023. This report also provides information about the complaints activity referred to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales during this reporting period.

Reason Scrutiny have requested the information:

For information prior to the presentation of this Annual Report, and all accompanying documentation, to the Cabinet Committee Meeting dated 7th November 2023.

Background

This report provides information relating to the Council's Compliments, Complaints and FOI activity between 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2023. The report itself is listed as **Appendix 1** and includes specific information on the number and type of compliments received, the different complaints stages, performance and outcomes relating to these and information on compliance with FOI and EIR legislation.

A report detailing the compliments and complaints activity in relation to Social Services is included as **Appendix 2**, and information about the Lessons Learned as a consequence of (corporate) complaints is provided within **Appendix 3**. The main report consists of a section about the contact received from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales ("the Ombudsman") during the reporting period. The Ombudsman's Annual Letter to the Council is included as **Appendix 4**, and this gives further details about all Ombudsman activity for Ceredigion, as well as for other Council's across Wales.

This is the fourth consecutive report where there have been no Ombudsman investigations commenced or formal reports issued in relation to complaints made against the Council. Whilst there were fewer Ombudsman referrals during this reporting year, the Council has a consistently high rate of Early Resolution/Voluntary Settlements.

It is therefore acknowledged that challenges remain in relation to the complexity of complaints received, a general increase in activity surrounding complaints, FOI, Ombudsman referrals and referrals to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), as well as the challenges associated with the delivery of the Complaints and FOI Team itself. These challenges have inevitably had an impact on the Council's ability to meet its performance objectives in relation to prescribed timescales.

Brief Overview:

↑ **465** Compliments were received

↑ **403** Enquiries were processed by the Complaints & FOI Service

↑ **144** Complaints were received: **Stage 1 = 96** **Stage 2 = 48**

↓ **35** 'Contacts' received via the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

↑ **882** FOI & EIR requests processed by the Complaints & FOI Service

Current Situation

- There were significantly more Compliments received during this reporting period. Improving the way that compliments are captured remains a piece of work that the Complaints and FOI Team needs to undertake, but this is being delayed due to capacity constraints.
- The service received a greater number of enquiries – many of which were either allocated back to the service areas to resolve pro-actively, or formal responses were required in order to explain why such matters could not be dealt with under the complaints procedures.
- It is worth noting that the number of complaints received by the Council was the third lowest in Wales.
- A great deal of work is needed to prevent Stage 1 complaints from escalating to Stage 2 unnecessarily on account that it has not been possible to respond within the prescribed timescale of ten-working-days.
- Compliance with timescales under Stage 2 also requires attention, as do the shortcomings in complaints handling that were referred to the Ombudsman. The Complaints and FOI Team continues to face challenges in meeting the demands of rises in the numbers of compliments, complaints, and FOI activity.
- As acknowledged above, there were fewer Ombudsman referrals than last year, but the number of Early Resolution / Voluntary Settlements is the highest in Wales.
- Complaints about Refuse Collection and Planning matters continue to be the main reasons for complaints; however, these services are predisposed to attracting complaints and these must be taken in context with the level of activity undertaken by these two service areas.
- Compliance with Freedom of Information (FOI) and Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) timescales requires significant improvement.

Areas to focus on

- Improving adherence with timescales prescribed in complaints and FOI/EIR policies/legislation
- Increase the resilience within the Complaints and FOI Team
- Reinforce the principle that complaints are owned throughout the Council
- Deliver a comprehensive training programme on complaints handling
- Improving system for capturing compliments and data surrounding lessons learned

- Continuing with open, transparent, and citizen-centred approach to resolving concerns

Wellbeing of Future Generations:

Has an Integrated Impact Assessment been completed? If not, please state why.

No IIA has been completed because there is no service change proposed within this report.

Summary of Integrated Impact Assessment:

Long term: N/A

Collaboration: N/A

Involvement: N/A

Prevention: N/A

Integration: N/A

Recommendation(s):

The Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the contents of this report in advance of its presentation at the Cabinet meeting on 7th November 2023.

Reasons for decision:

To ensure Members are aware of the performance of the Authority in respect of Compliments, Complaints and Freedom of Information.

Contact Name: Marie-Neige Hadfield

Designation: Complaints and Freedom of Information Manager

Date of Report: 28th September 2023

Acronyms:

CLO: Corporate Lead Officer

CSA: Complaints Standards Authority

EIR: Environmental Information Regulations

FOI: Freedom of Information

ICO: Information Commissioner's Office

PSOW: Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

Compliments, Complaints and Freedom of Information Report



Cyngor Sir
CEREDIGION
County Council

2022 – 2023

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report will provide information regarding the number of **Compliments, Complaints** and information requests received under the **Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000**, and the **Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) 2004** during the period between 1st April 2022 and 31st March 2023.
- 1.2 Each section of the report will focus on the Council's management and performance of each of its statutory and procedural obligations in respect of complaints management and access to information rights that are within the responsibility of the Complaints and FOI Team. The various legislation/policies are outlined below:
- * **Model Concerns and Complaints Policy (Corporate) 2020**
 - * **Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014**
 - * **Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA)**
 - * **Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR)**
- 1.3 The Complaints and FOI Team is a small team, consisting of 3.8 staff members, and is responsible for the administrative function under the aforementioned legislation and policies, including any cases referred to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales ("the Ombudsman"). The Complaints and FOI Team provides advice, assistance, and support to Council officers on a corporate level, as well as to schools – under a partnership agreement.
- 1.4 Following the formation of the **Complaints Standards Authority (CSA)** under the **Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) 2019 Act**, all public authorities across Wales are required to submit their complaints activity to the CSA on a quarterly basis. This information is freely available on the Ombudsman's [website](#).
- 1.5 The Council continues to work positively with the Ombudsman and Section 4 of this report will provide details of the **complaints that were referred to the Ombudsman** during this reporting year. It is worth noting that this is the fourth consecutive reporting period whereby there have been no formal investigations launched into a complaint against Ceredigion County Council. However, it is acknowledged that the Council has encountered the highest number of cases requiring Ombudsman intervention (compared with other Local Authorities). Such instances are referred to as Early Resolution/Voluntary Settlement decisions and will be addressed in greater detail below.
- 1.6 Pro-active resolution of any concerns received by citizens and service-users remains a high priority and every effort is made to achieve satisfactory outcomes when such instances are brought to our attention. Due to the continued efforts and positive collaboration between staff and managers across the Council, it is far more effective to resolve concerns when they are received as an 'enquiry', without needing to initiate the formal complaints procedure.

- 1.7 A total of **403 enquiries** were managed by the Complaints and FOI Team during this reporting period. However, the service does not yet have sufficient reporting capabilities that can identify how many of these enquiries subsequently required resolution via the (most appropriate) complaints procedure.
- 1.8 This report will provide some complaints information on a corporate level, i.e. data concerning complaints managed under the **corporate and the Social Services** policies. Both involve a **two-stage process**, but the requirements and timescales set out within each of these is different.
- 1.9 A report summarising the arrangements under the statutory Social Services complaints policy, which also provides analysis of all compliments and complaints that were received during 2022-2023, has been compiled for inclusion in the Statutory Director of Social Services' performance report. This document should be considered in conjunction with this report and is included as **Appendix 2**.
- 1.10 This report will therefore provide an overview of the corporate policy and additional detail surrounding the number, trends and outcomes of complaints registered for this reporting period (2022-2023).
- 1.11 The corporate Concerns and Complaints Policy consists of two stages;
- **Stage 1 is the informal stage and must be concluded within ten-working-days**
 - **Stage 2 requires a formal investigation, at a level deemed reasonable and proportionate to the issues being raised.**
- 1.12 The underpinning ethos for ensuring the effective resolution of complaints recommends as follows: '**Investigate once, investigate well**'. Formal investigations under Stage 2 may occasionally take longer than the **20-working-days** outlined within the policy. However, every effort will be made to keep the complainant informed as to any delays and when they should expect to receive the Council's formal response.
- 1.13 Information concerning the Council's performance in this regard is provided within this report, but the priority remains to ensure a robust and meaningful investigation is undertaken – even if this takes longer than the prescribed timescales. It is acknowledged however that significant challenges associated with service-continuity within the Complaints and FOI Team has once again impacted on the Service's ability to maintain effective communication with complainants in some instances.
- 1.14 The Corporate Lead Officer (CLO) for Policy, Performance & Public Protection is responsible for all complaints and FOI activity within the Council and will escalate matters of concern to the relevant member(s) of the Leadership Group. In addition, the CLO is the Council's nominated Senior Officer for the Ombudsman and the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) in relation to complaints and FOI performance, respectively.

2. Compliments

- 2.1 All compliments received from service-users are recorded and monitored on a regular basis. Such positive feedback is used to **share and promote good practice** wherever possible. Compliments are a source of encouragement that Council staff are delivering a valuable and high standard of service to those on the receiving end.
- 2.2 Opportunities may also exist to share good practice beyond the service area(s) receiving the positive feedback, as this can aid in adopting tried and tested methods of effective service delivery on a broader level.
- 2.3 The table below shows the number of compliments that were received for each service area during 2022-2023, along with the data for the two reporting periods preceding this:

Service	2020 – 2021	2021 – 2022	2022 – 2023
Customer Contact & ICT	37	29	44
Democratic Services	-	2	3
Economy & Regeneration	11	14	12
Finance & Procurement	24	5	6
Highways & Environmental Services	26	25	33
Legal & Governance	-	1	3
People & Organisation	-	-	-
Policy, Performance & Public Protection	3	5	16
Porth Cymorth Cynnar	344	29	57
Porth Cynnal	72	27	78
Porth Gofal	169	77	139
Schools & Lifelong Learning	11	4	5
*Corporate	117	6	69
Total	814	224	465

**Positive feedback provided in general terms (towards the entire Council workforce) and towards the office of the Chief Executive and Corporate Directors*

- 2.4 It is worth noting that the Council **only** records compliments that are received from **external sources**. As a consequence, services that have very little, or no, direct contact with the public will naturally be less likely to receive any positive feedback that would qualify for inclusion within this report. The absence of data recorded against certain services, therefore, is not indicative of a lack of appreciation for their working practices or any reflection on their general performance.
- 2.5 Data can be influenced by events during a specific reporting period, e.g. a significant number of compliments were received for Porth Cymorth Cynnar and on a 'Corporate' level, during 2020 – 2021. This is consistent with the extraordinary efforts made by officers during the height of the coronavirus pandemic (issuing food-boxes, support for carers etc.).
- 2.6 A similar trend occurred during this reporting period whereby a number of compliments were recorded on a 'corporate' level; this was mainly attributed to the success of the National Eisteddfod, that was held in Tregaron during August 2022.

2.7 Snapshot of compliments received during 2022 – 2023

"I'd just like to say how much I thoroughly enjoyed the recent events held through Porth Cymorth Cynnar in the Bandstand and Penparcau Family Centre. I learnt a lot and particularly enjoyed sewing my bucket hat. I hope there will be more events like these in the future." - Porth Cymorth Cynnar -

"On our recent short holiday based at Tregaron, we travelled by car to all points of the compass. We were impressed by the excellent condition of all the roads whether main A roads or narrow winding lanes, as we toured about. Thank you very much for contributing to an enjoyable first visit to your country." - Highways & Environmental Services -

"Amazing! Spent a lot of time here. Bird boxes, glitter, smoothies, hair, flower-arranging, climbing wall – great. Children loved it. Plenty of activities of all varieties. Thank you!" - Corporate -

"I'd like to thank the officers who have made it possible for the lower path of Pen Dinas to be widened and resurfaced, as I noticed today whilst walking on the hill. This will make a big difference to people in the area as well as tourists, increasing access for people with mobility issues and contributing to their wellbeing." - Economy & Regeneration -

"As ever, I am so very grateful for the excellent way in which you have helped us and continue to provide support. Your efficiency is outstanding and your advice on all matters is friendly, thorough, and very reassuring to me." - Porth Cynnal -

"A short message to thank you for supporting the sessions over the past few weeks and for sharing the information. What you are doing with the [Ukrainian Refugee] Welcome Centres is special – thank you very much." - Policy, Performance & Public Protection -

"Thank you / Diolch from the bottom of our hearts for all of the care and love you showed and gave to X. He was so happy and loved all of you, you gave him the best years of his life." - Porth Gofal -

"I just wanted to say a massive thank you for the ceremony yesterday: it was perfect! We wanted an intimate wedding with our little family unit and that's what we had. You've given us memories to treasure forever." - Customer Contact and ICT -

"Your support and advice have been incredibly valuable; I cannot thank you enough." - Corporate -

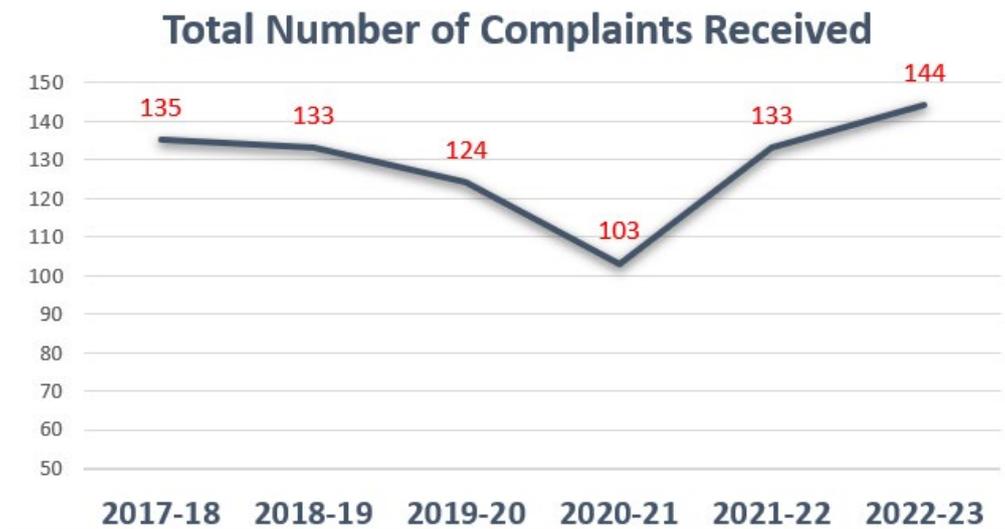
"Thank you to all the staff for arranging the Christmas Party in Hafan Deg. It was nice to see everyone today. Lovely food, music and presents for all." - Porth Cynnal -

"I would like to thank staff for all the work they do within Clic" - Customer Contact & ICT -

"I recently made a visit to mid-Wales visiting Rhayader, Devil's Bridge and then Aberystwyth via the mountain road. I had a wonderful time and wanted to express my satisfaction of the local services especially during these difficult times." - Corporate -

3. Complaints

3.1 The chart below shows the **total number of complaints** received by the Council each year. This does not include the number of service requests, enquiries or concerns that were able to be resolved by the relevant service(s) on a pro-active basis or those which did not fall within the remit of the complaints policies: e.g. instances whereby an alternative route of appeal was available, or if the issue being complained about was considered to be a *'properly made decision'*. This is when the Council takes a course of action that is entirely legitimate and is supported by legislation and/or policy.



3.2 The table below separates **complaints by stage**, for each of the reporting years referred to above.

Year	Stage 1	Stage 2	Total
2017-18	96	39	135
2018-19	92	40	133
2019-20	85	39	124
2020-21	61	42	103
2021-22	73	60	133
2022-23	96	48	144

3.3 No complaints were received during 2022-2023 regarding the provision (or lack thereof) of **Welsh Language services** across the Council, and no referrals were received from the Welsh Language Commissioner.

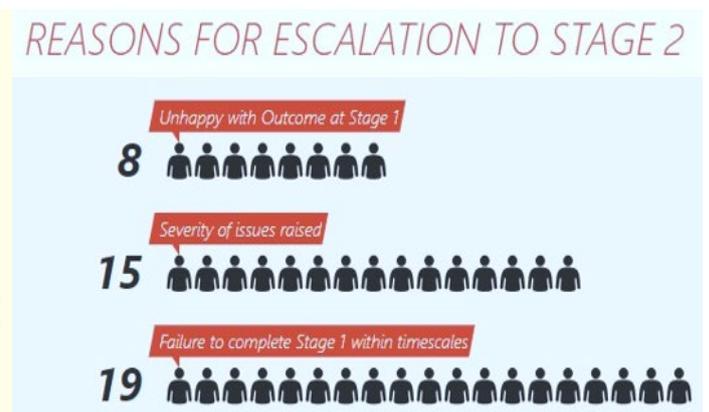
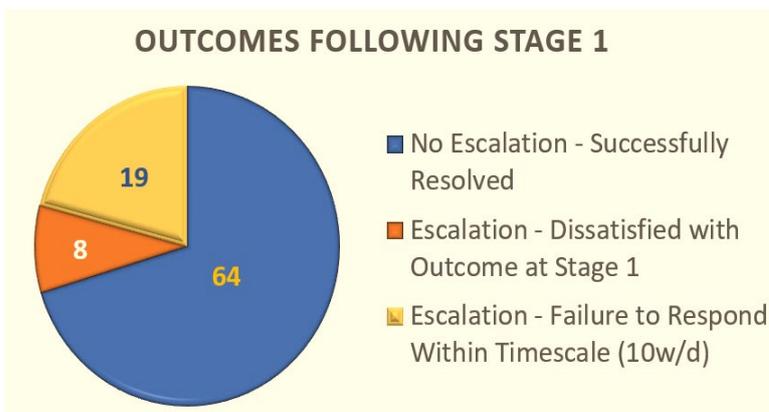
3.4 To put the above in context, it is worth noting that the Council logged **95,421** enquiries during 2022-2023.

3.5 This chart shows the **breakdown of complaints by Service** and also provides an additional **'multi-Service'** category, which is used when complaints span more than one service area.

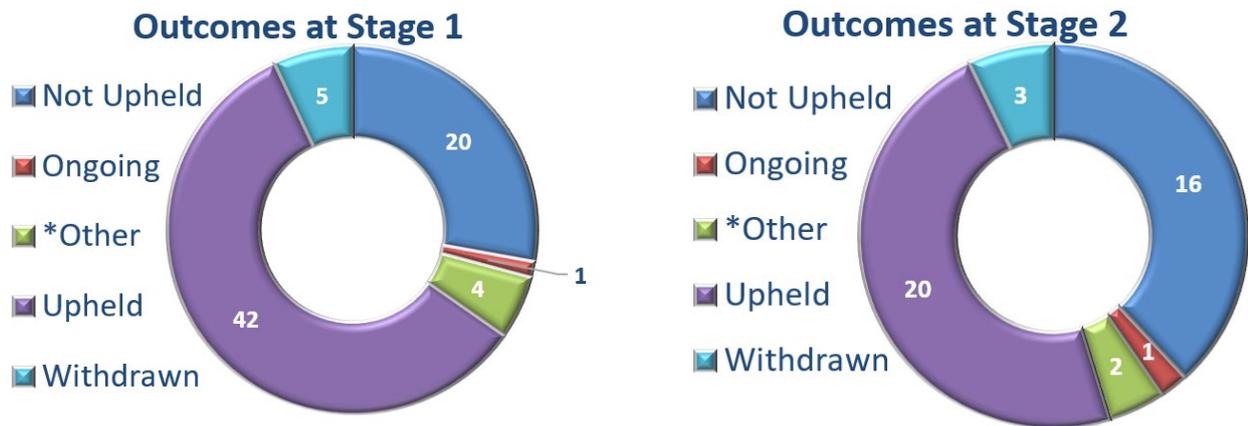


3.6 The following information refers to the number of complaints that were **closed** during this reporting year. Please note that there will be disparity between the number of complaints **received** and those that were **concluded** during 2022-2023, this is due to the time required to investigate and respond to complaints (e.g. a complaint received on 31st March 2022 will be recorded as having been received during 2021-2022, but unless the complaint is closed on the day of receipt, the **outcome** will be included within the annual report for 2022-2023).

3.7 Analysis of the **Stage 1** complaints that were concluded during 2022-2023 is provided below and shows the number of cases that were: **resolved successfully**, escalated to a **formal investigation** under Stage 2 (in the event the complainant was dissatisfied with the outcome), and the number of complaints that had to be escalated to Stage 2 due to the Council's **failure to respond** within the prescribed timescale for Stage 1 complaints (**ten-working-days**). The second chart shows the different **reasons** for why complaints were investigated at Stage 2. Of note, **15 complaints** were **immediately** considered at the formal stage, which is permitted under the policy and will usually occur when serious complaints are received, or those involving contact from the **Ombudsman**.



3.8 The outcomes of all **72 Stage 1 complaints** that were closed during 2022-2023 are shown below. The category referred to as ‘**Other**’ represents any complaints that were subsequently considered under a **different process** or were later deemed to be **outside of the scope of the complaints policy** (e.g. where an alternative policy should be followed or if it became apparent that the specific issue should not be considered as a ‘complaint’). The same applies to the **42 Stage 2 complaints** that were investigated under the corporate policy and were concluded during 2022-2023.



3.9 A total of **19 Stage 1** complaints were **escalated** to Stage 2 due to the **10-working-day timescale being exceeded**. This is consistent with the Model Complaints Policy issued by the Ombudsman in accordance with its Complaints Standards Authority (CSA) regulations. This represents **17%** of all Stage 1 complaints and demonstrates that improvements are needed to ensure compliance with the Stage 1 policy.

3.10 Of the **42 Stage 2** complaints that were investigated during this reporting period, **15** cases were closed **within the prescribed timescale of 20-working-days**. This represents only **36%** of all formal complaints having been closed within stipulated timescales. Again, **a great deal of improvement is needed** to ensure that complaints are investigated and responded to promptly. Such improvements will likely minimise the number of referrals to the Ombudsman.

3.11 Identifying lessons from complaints

3.12 Every effort has been made throughout this reporting period to capture more information on the **lessons that are identified as a consequence of complaints** and highlighting the **improvements and opportunities** arising from them. Unfortunately, the current recording system for complaints is incompatible for in-depth analysis on a case-by-case basis; however, all upheld complaints have been reviewed for the purposes of presenting information about lessons identified within this report.

3.13 Whilst there should always be opportunities to share good practice, more often than not improvements are identified when a complaint is **upheld**. Information is provided in **Appendix 3** which lists the various strategies, improvements and training opportunities that have all arisen as a consequence of a complaint.

- 3.14 Following consideration by various democratic committees when the Annual Compliments, Complaints and FOI Report was presented in 2022, a request was made for more information about complaints whereby '**communication**' was considered to be a significant factor. Analysis has therefore been undertaken in respect of this and, whilst **poor communication is a feature of most complaints**, information has been collated to determine the cases where this is the primary factor, or at least a significant aspect of the issue culminating in a complaint.
- 3.15 Of the **106** corporate complaints received during this reporting period, there were **56 cases** that directly referred to a **lack of communication** on the Council's part. Of these, **39 complaints** arose simply as a consequence of service's '**failure to respond**' to people. It must also be mentioned that the **Complaints and FOI Team** has experienced significant challenges in **maintaining communication** with those who contact the service (either during the course of the complaints process or when seeking to resolve the vast number of enquiries received).
- 3.16 The main reasons given for the communication shortcomings predominantly refers to a **lack of available resources** and problems encountered with the **allocation of service requests** and/or **enquiries**. This must be viewed in the context of the **increasing demands** from the public and the **additional complexity** of the issues arising.

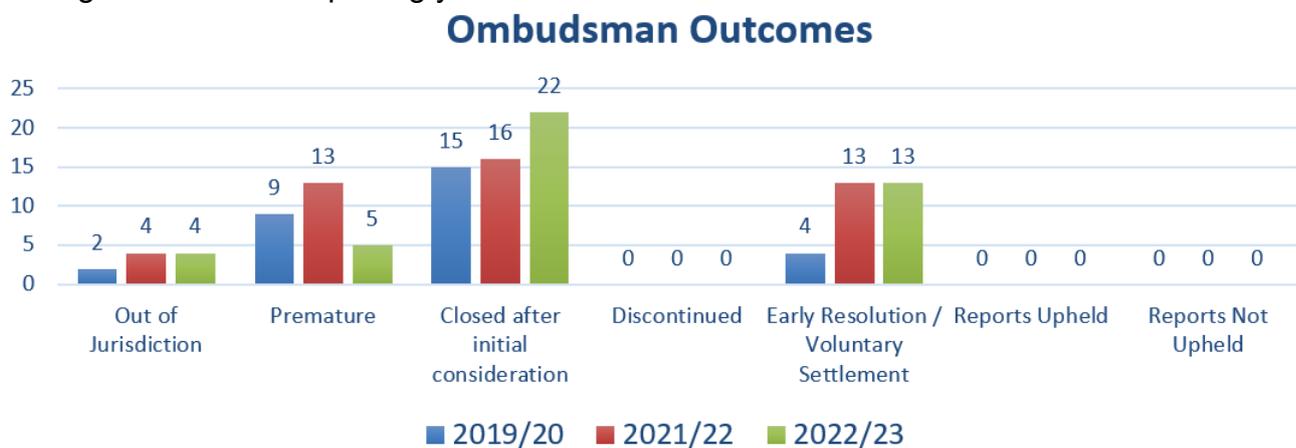
4. Complaints to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

- 4.1 Information regarding the number of complaints that were referred to the **Ombudsman** during the reporting year is detailed within the Ombudsman's **Annual Letter**, which is provided in **Appendix 4**. This document gives some detail surrounding the **service areas** that have been involved in referrals to the Ombudsman, as well as their **outcomes**.
- 4.2 Whilst the Council received **fewer referrals** to the Ombudsman during 2022-2023 – a total of **35**, compared with **52** contacts during 2021-2022, the number of cases resolved via **Early Resolution / Voluntary Settlement** is **consistent** with last year, totalling **13 cases**. Once again, the Ombudsman **did not conduct any investigations** into complaints referred to her office, though it is acknowledged that Ceredigion received the highest proportion of Ombudsman interventions compared with other Councils across Wales.
- 4.3 **Poor communication** remains a key theme in respect of complaints made to the Ombudsman. **Summaries** of the cases requiring Ombudsman intervention is provided in the **Appendix 5** (in relation to all Council services), and it is evident that the challenges that have faced the **Complaints and FOI Team** in particular, has had an **impact** on the ability to provide an **effective complaint handling service**. Again, this is as a consequence of the demands on the small team, that deals with complaints, FOI and EIR, and provides advice and assistance to schools under a designated Partnership Agreement.

4.4 The high volume of ‘enquiries’ (which in themselves may not be straightforward - as these will include cases whereby the complaints policy may not apply, but which require a comprehensive response nonetheless) is a **key factor** in the deployment of critical resources to an aspect of work that cannot be measured. This was further compounded by **staff absence** and the **recruitment and training** of a new staff member.

4.5 It is encouraging to note that of the **44 complaints closed** by the Ombudsman during 2022-2023, **31** were either **premature (5)**, **out of jurisdiction (4)** or, in the **majority** of cases (**22**) the Ombudsman **closed the complaint following their initial assessment**. This suggests that the **action** taken by the Council was **reasonable and proportionate**, and that nothing further could be achieved by the Ombudsman undertaking a review of the case.

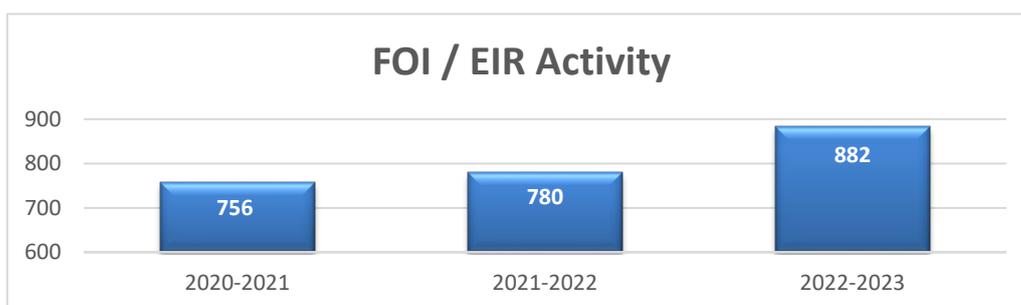
4.6 The graph provided below shows the outcomes of all complaints closed by the Ombudsman during the last three reporting years:



5. Requests Received under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act and the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR)

5.1 During this reporting period the Council received a total of **882** requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) or Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR). Of these, **13** cases were escalated to the Corporate Lead Officer (CLO) for Policy, Performance & Public Protection requiring Internal Review.

5.2 This demonstrates a slight increase compared with previous years, as shown below:



- 5.3 In addition, **9 complaints** were made to the **Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)**, all of which were resolved without further action. This remains consistent with the previous reporting year, which also recorded 9 referrals to the ICO.
- 5.4 The Council's **compliance** with meeting the timescales set out under FOI legislation and the EIR Regulations (**20-working-days**, with EIR's allowed to take up to **40-working-days** if the information requested is voluminous) was a cause for concern, which has prompted a significant amount of work to raise awareness of the Council's statutory obligations in this regard.
- 5.5 A **breakdown** of the number of FOI's and EIR's received according to **Service** is provided below.

Service	FOIs Received	EIRs Received
Customer Contact & ICT	68	-
Democratic Services	18	-
Economy & Regeneration	61	38
Finance & Procurement	172	-
Highways & Environmental Services	64	31
Legal & Governance Services	7	-
People & Organisation	58	-
Policy, Performance & Public Protection	123	10
Porth Cymorth Cynnar	12	1
Porth Cynnal	63	-
Porth Gofal	87	-
Schools & Lifelong Learning	60	-
Multi-Service	9	-
Total	802	80

Social Services Compliments & Complaints Report 2022-2023

Compliments

A total of **217 compliments** were received from service-users and/or their representatives during this reporting period. This is more than double the number of compliments that were recorded for Social Services during 2021-2022 (104 in total). Some examples of the compliments received are provided below.

Service	Compliments Received
Porth Cynnal	78
Porth Gofal	139
Total	217

“As ever, I am so very grateful for the excellent way in which you have helped us and continue to provide support. Your efficiency is outstanding and your advice on all matters is friendly, thorough, and very reassuring to me.”
– Mental Health / Wellbeing

“(Service user) was grateful for the afternoon and enjoyed meeting us all, knowing that the support was there should she need it.” – Early Intervention

“Thank you / Diolch from the bottom of our hearts for all of the care and love you showed and gave to X. He was so happy and loved all of you, you gave him the best years of his life.” – Porth Gofal

“Thank you for all your help and support during the last few months, my grandmother and the whole family appreciated it.”
– Direct Services

“The holistic manner that you work with, is outstanding and I so wish that others who are educating themselves in order to work in social care could have some of your insight in how things should be done and be allowed the time and resources to do so. Once again you are an absolutely fantastic social worker and there should be more like you.” – Mental Wellbeing

“We are very pleased with the quick response from the OT Service. They were clear in their communication, kept us updated throughout, and have provided valuable support to enable my mum, who is 93, to be much safer and more confident in her own home. This has been hugely beneficial to myself and the rest of the family, as we have been very worried about her. We are very thankful for the help and support.” –
Occupational Therapy Service

“Thank you for putting forward various options and many thanks for your kind assistance.” – Integrated Triage & Assessment Service

Complaints Report

Introduction

This report will refer specifically to all **Social Services compliments and complaints** received during 2022 – 2023. This data will also be included as part of the Council's Annual Compliments, Complaints and Freedom of Information (FOI) Report for 2022 – 2023, on a corporate level, which will be published later in the year.

The Council has fully implemented the requirements outlined in Welsh Government's statutory **Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014** and the **Representations Procedure (Wales) Regulations 2014**. These regulations underpin the Council's own **Social Services Complaints Policy**, which is due to be reviewed during the forthcoming year. The current Policy was approved by the Council's Cabinet committee on 17th March 2020, and predominantly sets out the responsibilities placed upon staff within **Porth Cynnal** and **Porth Gofal** Services, as well as the corporate **Complaints and FOI Team**. This promotes accountability and ensures that effective arrangements are in place to resolve concerns at the earliest opportunity, and if this is not possible, to ensure complaints are managed in accordance with the Council's statutory obligations.

It is vital that the Social Services complaints process operates in accordance with the principles of the **Social Services and Well-being Act (Wales) 2014**, as well as ensuring that the process is accessible to all, and is fair and transparent.

Social Services Complaints Activity

Every effort is made to resolve complaints pro-actively and in many cases this is successful. In such instances the contact will be recorded as a concern. However, in some cases this is not possible, particularly when the issues being raised are of a serious or complex nature. These instances will be managed in accordance with the aforementioned complaints policy and procedures.

The Social Services complaints procedure consists of **two stages**, and Corporate Managers within Social Services (i.e. Porth Cynnal and Porth Gofal) are responsible for managing complaints against their respective service-areas, ensuring that the appropriate level of decision-making and accountability is in place. The Corporate Managers strive to achieve meaningful outcomes as a consequence of complaints and, where necessary, measures will be implemented to ensure lessons are learned and any service improvements are prioritised. The Complaints and FOI Team is independent from Social Services, managed within the Policy, Performance & Public Protection Service, and is responsible for overseeing the administration of the complaints process.

A total of **60 'concerns'** were received within the reporting period, with the majority having been resolved satisfactorily without requiring escalation under the formal complaints procedure. However, this report will focus on the **complaints** that were investigated under stages 1 and 2 during the course of the reporting year.

For information, Stage 1 is the only opportunity that is available for Corporate Managers to investigate and/or resolve a complaint. The statutory regulations stipulate that an Independent Investigating Officer (IIO) must be appointed to conduct investigations at Stage 2 and, in cases involving children, an Independent Person (IP) is also commissioned to oversee the investigation process. Once the Council’s own complaints process has been exhausted, complainants have the right to refer their complaint to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) if they remain dissatisfied.

Total number of complaints received in 2022 – 2023

Service Area	Stage 1	Stage 2	Total
Porth Cynnal	19	6	25
Porth Gofal	12	1	13
	31	7	38

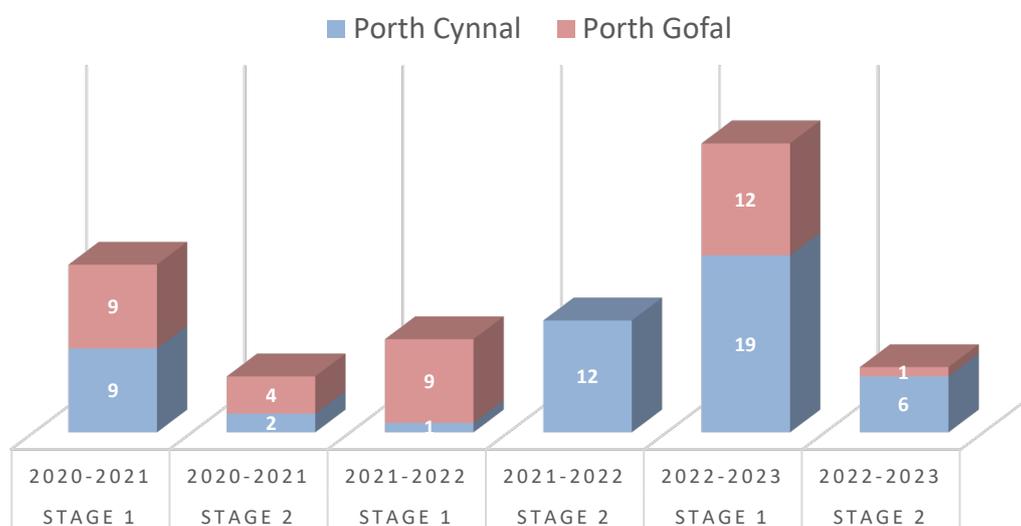
A total of **38 complaints** were received in relation to Social Services in 2022–2023, which demonstrates an increase when comparing these figures to the previous reporting period. During 2021–2022 there were **22** complaints in total which were addressed under the Social Services complaints policy.

Senior staff in Porth Gofal and Porth Cynnal continue to work closely with the Complaints and FOI Team by adopting an early-resolution approach when appropriate and this is proving to be an effective strategy. From the 60 concerns managed pro-actively, only eleven cases subsequently went on to be investigated at Stages 1 and/or 2; this equates to **82% of all concerns having been resolved satisfactorily** in the first instance.

Comparative data

Comparative data is provided below with regard to complaints received by Porth Cynnal and Porth Gofal, for the years 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 and the current reporting period – 2022-2023.

SOCIAL SERVICES COMPLAINTS



Complaint Outcomes by Service

A breakdown of the number of complaints and their outcomes is provided below, in accordance with the relevant service areas:

Porth Cynnal	Not Upheld	Upheld	Ongoing / Suspended / Discontinued
Planned Care (Adults) (3)		1	2
Planned Care (Children) (6)	2	2	2
Safeguarding (Adults) (4)	1		3
Safeguarding (Children) (4)	1		3
Extended Support (Adults) (6)	1		5
Mental Wellbeing (Adults) (2)	2		
Total	7	3	15

Porth Gofal	Not Upheld	Upheld	Ongoing / Suspended / Discontinued
Integrated Triage & Assessment (Adults) (6)	2	1	2
Integrated Triage & Assessment (Children) (3)	1	2	
Targeted Intervention Service (3)			3
Direct Services (1)		1	
Total	3	5	5

Stage 1 Timescales

Of the **31** complaints which were recorded at Stage 1, only **16** were concluded (i.e. not suspended, withdrawn or discontinued – this will be explained in more detail in the analysis). **7** of these complaints were closed within the prescribed timescales. The remaining **9** exceeded the timescales.



Stage 2 Timescales

Only **5** of the **7** complaints that were recorded at Stage 2, progressed to the independent investigation stage, because two complainants decided to withdraw their complaints. All five of the complaints that were investigated took longer than prescribed timescale of 25-working-days.

However, the statutory requirements to obtain written approval from the Director of Social Services was fully complied with, and responses were issued at the earliest opportunity following completion of the investigation.

Analysis and Conclusions

Firstly, closer analysis of the **60 cases** that were initially recorded as ‘**concerns**’ revealed that **only 11** of these **subsequently escalated to the formal complaints stage**. This predominantly supports the benefits associated with taking a ‘**pro-active resolution**’ approach, where possible. The remaining 49 concerns (82%) were resolved successfully without further action required.

There has clearly been an **increase** in the number of complaints received in relation to Social Services during 2022-2023. Having received **31 Stage 1** complaints in the last year, this is the highest level since 2015-2016, when 32 Stage 1 complaints were received in a single year. There were **fewer Stage 2 investigations** conducted during this reporting period and in terms of outcomes, the ratio of upheld to not upheld complaints was fairly balanced.

However, the most striking factor within this year’s report is that a total of **20 complaints** were not concluded. There are a variety of reasons behind these, which will be explained below.

A ‘complaint’ is usually recorded at the point of receipt when it is deemed to meet the criteria for instigating the policy immediately: i.e. it is not a ‘first time request for a service’ or the issues being raised are felt to be sufficiently serious that intervention at Corporate Manager level is necessary.

There are, however, other factors that need to be considered once a complaint is formally recorded, but before the process can actively commence:

- ensuring appropriate consent is obtained from the service-user (when others raise concerns on their behalf).
- consideration as to whether there are any ‘concurrent investigations’ underway (i.e. if there are any court proceedings or safeguarding investigations that could be compromised by a complaint investigation)
- ascertaining whether the complaints process can be followed at all (e.g. instances whereby the complainant is seeking to overturn a decision made by a Court)

In these instances, the complaint may not be able to progress until the necessary checks are completed and this can occasionally take some time, whilst engagement between the Service and the complainant ensues.

Analysis of the **20 complaints** that were not concluded during the reporting period showed that:

- **3 complaints** were **resolved immediately** following the intervention of the Corporate Manager for the relevant Service.
- Failure to supply the service-user’s **consent** accounted for the discontinuation of **4 complaints**.
- In **5 cases**, the complainant **failed to engage** with the complaints process and the cases were subsequently closed.
- **4 complaints** were **ongoing** or **escalated to Stage 2** before completion of the Stage 1 complaint.
- **3 cases** were actively **withdrawn** by the complainant’s.
- **1 complaint** was unable to be progressed due to **other investigations** taking priority.

Whilst this is an unprecedented number of complaints that were not concluded within the reporting year, the cases were managed in accordance with the statutory policies and procedures and, in the interests of openness and transparency these complaints were not removed from the system. Furthermore, all complaints were shared with the relevant service areas and the Corporate Managers responsible in each case sought to ensure that there were no underlying issues that required further intervention or investigation.

Response times at both stages of the complaints process requires improvement, though only one case exceeded the six-month timeframe. Complaints that take longer than the prescribed timescale to resolve is occasionally unavoidable, and the overarching priority is to ensure that complaints are investigated thoroughly, and careful consideration is given to the findings and recommendations which emerge from such investigations.

Porth Cynnal received a higher number of complaints which is largely due to the nature of the services they deliver, and their complexity.

Of the **18 complaints** that were fully investigated, **8** were upheld. Although this is an increase compared with the figures analysed during 2021-2022 (4 complaints upheld), this represents 44% of all complaints investigated, which is still an improvement on the statistics for 2020-2021, whereby 58% were upheld. Further, whilst almost half of all complaints investigated were upheld, acknowledgement must also be given to the number of concerns that were successfully resolved, and the complaints that were withdrawn earlier in the process because of the work undertaken by services to remedy the issues.

Themes and Trends

Poor communication remains a consistent factor in most complaints, and, in many cases, these are addressed promptly at service-level to prevent unnecessary escalation. This was evidently the case in respect of the 49 concerns resolved pro-actively, which far exceeds the number of cases that were subsequently investigated under the formal complaints process.

Timescales

As identified in previous reporting periods, improvements need to be made with regard to response times, particularly at Stage 1 of the complaints process. There is a requirement at Stage 1 to offer a 'discussion' between the complainant and the relevant Corporate Manager. Therefore, securing the availability of managers remains a challenge, as well as attempting to then co-ordinate their availability with that of the complainant. This will continue to be monitored in future reporting periods.

It has also become increasingly evident during the course of the reporting period that poor complaints handling has become a prominent feature in the failure to process cases expediently. Extensive efforts are being made to ensure better communication between Social Services and the Complaints and FOI Team, but some challenges have arisen as a consequence of increased complaints and FOI activity on a corporate level, as well as in the case of Social Services. This remains an ongoing concern which has been escalated as necessary.

Learning Lessons

In all cases whereby a complaint is deemed to be upheld (either in its entirety or specific elements) it is crucial that recommendations are put in place to learn lessons and prevent any recurrence in the future. Examples of some lessons learned from complaints received during 2022–2023 are summarised below:

- *It was agreed that the Service would commence a weekly log of all communication, which will be shared with the complainant and minutes of meetings will be shared promptly with the relevant parties. This should limit anxiety levels due to lack of communication and delays in receiving documentation from the service.*
- *Relevant staff will ensure that discussions are held with interested parties in advance of formal meetings, so that everybody is aware of the format of the meeting and how they are expected to contribute to this. These discussions will be recorded, and a formal record will be given to all attendees as part of the process. In addition, staff were reminded about the importance of making a brief log of any telephone conversations, in accordance with relevant Council policies.*
- *Completion of assessments / reviews and carer's assessments to be considered upon receipt of complaints, to ensure that level of care provision adequately meets the needs of the individual.*

Complaints referred to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW)

During 2022–2023 the Council received **eleven** new contacts from the office of the PSOW relating to Social Services complaints. These related to cases within the following services:

- Porth Cynnal (7)
- Porth Gofal (4)

There were a greater number of referrals received from the Ombudsman during 2022-2023, with only 9 having been received in 2021-2022.

Whilst no complaints referred to the PSOW resulted in a formal investigation, there were **eight complaints** that required intervention by the Ombudsman. These complaints were resolved by way of '**Early Resolution / Voluntary Settlement agreements**' reached with the Ombudsman's office, the details of which are provided in the table overleaf.

Cases requiring Ombudsman intervention by way of Early Resolution Agreements

Service(s) & Reference	Summary of Complaint	Agreed Actions
<p>Porth Cynnal; Extended Support and Complaint Handling</p> <p>Case ref: 202200812</p>	<p>Complaint had previously been investigated independently under Stage 2; however, the complainant remained dissatisfied with the outcome.</p> <p>The complainant's main concerns were that the Service failed to undertake appropriate and necessary assessments to determine her relative's degree of learning disabilities, and that it failed to consider vital information provided during a telephone consultation.</p>	<p>The Ombudsman advised that the Council should respond to the additional queries raised by the complainant, following the independent investigation at Stage 2.</p>
<p>Porth Cynnal; Safeguarding and Complaint Handling</p> <p>Case Ref: 202201388</p>	<p>Complaint had previously been investigated independently under Stage 2. This process was unnecessarily protracted, and clarification was sought by the complainant regarding information that was included within the independent investigation report.</p> <p>In particular, the complainant wished to receive further information regarding the case law that was referred to, which the Social Worker had based their decision upon when providing care to the complainant's relative.</p>	<p>The Council agreed to provide additional information surrounding the case law that had been considered by the Social Worker at the time that decisions were made surrounding care provision.</p> <p>In addition, an earlier agreement to award a 'Time and Trouble' payment due to the lengthy complaints process, had been overlooked at the point that the formal response was issued. Therefore the Council honoured its earlier decision in this regard, and acknowledged the additional inconvenience caused by having to approach the Ombudsman to obtain the information requested.</p>
<p>Porth Cynnal; Extended Support</p> <p>Case Ref: 202200853</p>	<p>Complaint that the Council had failed to properly implement the terms of an Early Resolution agreement undertaken in September 2020. This included the Council's failure to fully complete a Carer's Assessment, and for the continuing uncertainty surrounding the terms and arrangements of Respite Care. The Complainant was also aggrieved that the Council appeared to take an inconsistent approach to Direct Payment uplift.</p>	<p>The Council agreed to follow up on the arrangements previously agreed in relation to conducting a Carer's Assessment. An Independent Social Worker was commissioned to complete this task.</p> <p>The Council also agreed to write to the complainant within six weeks to provide a full explanation regarding the Council's approach in respect of providing respite care.</p>

<p>Porth Gofal; Integrated Triage & Assessment and Complaint Handling</p> <p>Case Ref: 202205115</p>	<p>Complaint regarding the Council's failure to take seriously the concerns raised by the service-user about the care provider that was commissioned to assist her. The Complainant made a complaint directly to the care provider, but their response was incomplete and inaccurate.</p> <p>The Council declined to investigate the complaint because it was satisfied with the care provider's response and that no further action was needed. However, the Ombudsman disagreed – ruling that the Council did not fulfil its duty to accept the complaint in line with the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations.</p>	<p>The Council agreed to contact the complainant to obtain her complaint and issue a response which was consistent with the statutory complaints procedure.</p>
<p>Porth Cynnal; Extended Support and Complaint Handling</p> <p>Case Ref: 202206613</p>	<p>Complainant contacted the Ombudsman because the Council had failed to investigate the complaints she had submitted in February 2022.</p>	<p>The Council accepted it had failed to investigate the complaints raised and agreed to commence Stage 1 of the complaints process immediately. An apology was also given for this failure in complaints handling and a redress payment was agreed in acknowledgement of the Time and Trouble the complaint went to in order to have her complaint considered.</p>
<p>Porth Gofal; Integrated Triage & Assessment Service & Complaint Handling</p> <p>Case Ref: 202202005</p>	<p>Complaint that the Council had failed to provide regular and meaningful updates regarding her complaint.</p>	<p>The Council agreed to issue a formal apology and an explanation for the delays she experienced during her complaint. It was also agreed that the formal response would be issued within four weeks of the Ombudsman's decision, and a payment of £100 would be given in recognition of the time and trouble the complainant went to in making her complaint to the Ombudsman.</p>

<p>Porth Cynnal; Extended Support and Complaint Handling</p> <p>Case Ref: 202107463</p>	<p>Following an independent investigation at Stage 2 of the Social Services Complaint Procedure, the complainant contacted the Ombudsman because the Council had failed to implement the recommendations made by the Independent Investigating Officer.</p> <p>In addition, the Council had failed to inform him that a full safeguarding investigation would not be taking place; though the issues identified during the complaint were considered during a Professional Concerns Meeting, under the All Wales Safeguarding Procedures.</p>	<p>By way of a Voluntary Settlement Agreement, the Ombudsman proposed that the Council and the Support Service that was involved in the original complaint, should meet with the complainant and his son (the service-user) formally to explain the safeguarding decision and to discuss any additional measures that would facilitate future learning.</p> <p>It was also agreed that a direct apology was warranted for the lack of communication following the conclusion of the Stage 2 investigation. The Council agreed with this proposal and the necessary actions were undertaken.</p>
<p>Porth Cynnal: Safeguarding Service and Complaint Handling</p> <p>Case Ref: 202107158</p>	<p>Complaint about the Council's failure to close down a safeguarding case promptly, which had repercussions on the complainant's ability to resume specific working responsibilities. The Complainant also stated that her complaint was not appropriately addressed once she had brought these matters to the Council's attention.</p>	<p>The Council accepted full responsibility for the delays the complainant experienced in respect of the safeguarding case, and that this was further compounded by the failure to manage her complaint effectively. Further, the Council accepted it had not fully appreciated the impact that these matters had on the complainant.</p> <p>The Council agreed to provide a corporate apology for the maladministration identified by the Ombudsman and provide financial redress in the sum of £725 in recognition of the injustice that prevented her from returning to her duties within a youth organisation, and for the poor complaints handling – including the time and trouble invested by her, having to pursue her complaint.</p>

Identifying Lessons from Complaints

Summary of Complaint	Lessons Learned
<p>Complaints regarding delayed disclosures under UK General Data Protection Regulations (UK GDPR) i.e. in respect of Subject Access Requests.</p> <p>NB: Whilst such complaints are recorded against the Customer Contact & ICT Service, as the lead service for Data Protection, delays mainly arose due to wider services failing to provide the information within the timescale allotted under SAR.</p>	<p>Delays in obtaining information from services – Data Protection Officer to remind Service of their statutory duties re SAR.</p>
<p>Complaint regarding delays in processing cases within the Planning Service.</p>	<p>Extensive efforts are being made to address capacity constraints within the service, including the appointment of external consultants to assist and provide a level of resilience moving forward.</p>
<p>Complaints re. missed waste collections.</p>	<p>Every effort is being made to avoid or minimise service disruption, though this may not be possible - depending on the cause of the disruption (i.e. staff absence or problems with the fleet).</p> <p>Moving forward, the team will review the way that assisted waste collections are provided and communicated within the team. A review of handover arrangements for supervisors will also be undertaken.</p> <p>Review carried out to find an alternative approach to waste collections scheduled for Bank Holiday Mondays being adopted during 2023. Elected Members are provided with twice daily updates on any disruptions.</p>

<p>Complaint regarding improvement work that was due to take place on a Council-adopted Road.</p>	<p>Apologies issued for failing to complete the work that had been agreed and the Corporate Lead Officer will act as the single point of contact for the complainant until the work is complete.</p>
<p>Complaint about delay in sending information to complainant.</p>	<p>Apologies given for delays, which were due to lack of capacity within the service(s) involved – every effort will be made to identify and implement improvements.</p>
<p>Multi-service complaint which included aspects about transport, though the primary failure arose as a consequence of poor complaints handling.</p>	<p>Transport arrangements will be reviewed as soon as possible; however it is acknowledged that the complaint should have been expedited due to the issues being raised. Further training will be provided to the relevant officers.</p>
<p>Complaint about the Council’s failure to assess information provided by the service-user, which led to additional problems arising for them.</p>	<p>Apology provided and identified that more timely intervention would have assisted the complainant.</p>
<p>Error made by service, which was rectified once complaint was received, and the service became aware of the issue.</p>	<p>Class C exemption should have been applied - records amended (inc. Bill) to reflect the error. Apologies given.</p>
<p>Complaint about the advice provided by the Housing Service and the delay in resolving the complainant’s case.</p>	<p>Apology given for delays and explanation for this - resource problems at the time, which have since been resolved.</p>
<p>Delay in responding to enquiry and subsequent failure to ensure the issue was managed in accordance with the most appropriate protocol.</p>	<p>Training provided re Customer Charter and Complaints Policy</p>



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Cllr. Bryan Davies
Ceredigion County Council
By Email only: bryan.davies@ceredigion.go.uk

Annual Letter 2022/23

Dear Councillor Davies

I am pleased to provide you with the Annual letter (2022/23) for Ceredigion County Council which deals with complaints relating to maladministration and service failure, complaints relating to alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct for Councillors and the actions being taken to improve public services.

This letter coincides with my Annual Report – “[A year of change – a year of challenge](#)” – a sentiment which will no doubt resonate with public bodies across Wales. My office has seen another increase in the number of people asking for our help – up 3% overall compared to the previous year, and my office now receives double the number of cases we received a decade ago.

In the last year, I have met with public bodies across Wales – speaking about our casework, our recommendations, and our proactive powers. The current climate will continue to provide challenges for public services, but I am grateful for the positive and productive way in which local authorities continue to engage with my office.

1,020 complaints were referred to us regarding local authorities last year - a reduction of 11% compared to the previous year. During this period, we intervened in (upheld, settled or resolved at an early stage) 13% of local authority complaints.

We received fewer Code of Conduct complaints in 22/23 compared to the previous year, relating to both Principal Councils and Town and Community Councils. My role is such that I do not make final findings about breaches of the Code of Conduct. Instead, where investigations find the most serious concerns, these are referred to the Standards Committee of the relevant local authority, or the

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Adjudication Panel for Wales. In 2022/23, the Ombudsman made 12 such referrals – a welcome reduction from 20 last year.

Supporting improvement of public services

Despite the challenges of last year, we have pushed forward with our proactive improvement work and launched a new Service Quality process to ensure we deliver the standards we expect.

Last year, we began work on our second wider Own Initiative investigation – this time looking into carers assessments within local authorities. This investigation will take place throughout the coming year, and we look forward to sharing our findings with all local authorities – not just those involved in the investigation.

The Complaints Standards Authority (CSA) continued its work with public bodies in Wales last year, with more than 50 public bodies now operating our model policy. We've also now provided more than 400 training sessions since we started, with local authorities, in September 2020.

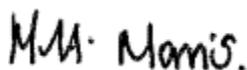
We continued our work to publish complaints statistics into a second year, with data now published twice a year. This data allows us to see information with greater context – for example, last year 25% of Ceredigion County Council's complaints were referred to PSOW.

I would encourage Ceredigion County Council, 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.

Yours sincerely,



Michelle Morris
Public Services Ombudsman

cc. Eifion Evans, Chief Executive, Ceredigion County Council.
By Email only: Eifion.evans@ceredigion.gov.uk



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Factsheet

Appendix A - Complaints Received

Local Authority	Complaints Received	Received per 1000 residents
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	16	0.24
Bridgend County Borough Council	55	0.38
Caerphilly County Borough Council	49	0.28
Cardiff Council*	142	0.39
Carmarthenshire County Council	53	0.28
Ceredigion County Council	35	0.49
Conwy County Borough Council	31	0.27
Denbighshire County Council	32	0.33
Flintshire County Council	65	0.42
Cyngor Gwynedd	36	0.31
Isle of Anglesey County Council	25	0.36
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council	17	0.29
Monmouthshire County Council	23	0.25
Neath Port Talbot Council	39	0.27
Newport City Council	42	0.26
Pembrokeshire County Council	44	0.36
Powys County Council	38	0.29
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council**	54	0.23
Swansea Council	94	0.39
Torfaen County Borough Council	16	0.17
Vale of Glamorgan Council	49	0.37
Wrexham County Borough Council	65	0.48
Total	1020	0.33
* inc 9 Rent Smart Wales		
** inc 2 South Wales Parking Group		

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Appendix B - Received by Subject

Ceredigion County Council	Complaints Received	% share
Adult Social Services	5	14%
Benefits Administration	0	0%
Children's Social Services	1	3%
Community Facilities, Recreation and Leisure	1	3%
Complaints Handling	14	40%
Covid19	0	0%
Education	1	3%
Environment and Environmental Health	2	6%
Finance and Taxation	0	0%
Housing	3	9%
Licensing	1	3%
Planning and Building Control	2	6%
Roads and Transport	1	3%
Various Other	4	11%
Total	35	



Appendix C - Complaint Outcomes
(* denotes intervention)

Ceredigion County Council		% Share
Out of Jurisdiction	4	9%
Premature	5	11%
Other cases closed after initial consideration	22	50%
Early Resolution/ voluntary settlement*	13	30%
Discontinued	0	0%
Other Reports - Not Upheld	0	0%
Other Reports Upheld*	0	0%
Public Interest Reports*	0	0%
Special Interest Reports*	0	0%
Total	44	



Appendix D - Cases with PSOW Intervention

	No. of interventions	No. of closures	% of interventions
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	0	16	0%
Bridgend County Borough Council	5	57	9%
Caerphilly County Borough Council	6	52	12%
Cardiff Council	25	145	17%
Cardiff Council - Rent Smart Wales	1	9	11%
Carmarthenshire County Council	7	60	12%
Ceredigion County Council	13	44	30%
Conwy County Borough Council	5	35	14%
Denbighshire County Council	2	33	6%
Flintshire County Council	5	70	7%
Cyngor Gwynedd	5	33	15%
Isle of Anglesey County Council	5	25	20%
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council	1	18	6%
Monmouthshire County Council	1	22	5%
Neath Port Talbot Council	7	38	18%
Newport City Council	8	48	17%
Pembrokeshire County Council	3	45	7%
Powys County Council	8	44	18%
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council	2	54	4%
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council - South Wales Parking Group	0	2	0%
Swansea Council	10	99	10%
Torfaen County Borough Council	1	17	6%
Vale of Glamorgan Council	15	53	28%
Wrexham County Borough Council	6	67	9%
Total	141	1086	13%



Appendix E - Code of Conduct Complaints

Ceredigion County Council

Decision not to investigate	1
Discontinued	1
No evidence of breach	0
No action necessary	0
Refer to Adjudication Panel	0
Refer to Standards Committee	0
Total	2

Investigations

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Appendix F - Town/Community Council Code of Complaints

Town/Community Council	Decision not to investigate	Investigations				Total	
		Discontinued	No evidence of breach	No action necessary	Refer to Adjudication Panel		Refer to Standards Committee
Llandysul Community Council	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Llanfair Clydogau Community Council	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Llangoedmor Community Council	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Llansantffraed Community Council	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
New Quay Town Council	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Trefeurig Community Council	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

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Information Sheet

Appendix A shows the number of complaints received by PSOW for all Local Authorities in 2022/23. These complaints are contextualised by the population of each authority.

Appendix B shows the categorisation of each complaint received, and what proportion of received complaints represents for the Local Authority.

Appendix C shows outcomes of the complaints which PSOW closed for the Local Authority in 2022/23. This table shows both the volume, and the proportion that each outcome represents for the Local Authority.

Appendix D shows Intervention Rates for all Local Authorities in 2022/23. An intervention is categorised by either an upheld complaint (either public interest or non-public interest), an early resolution, or a voluntary settlement.

Appendix E shows the outcomes of Code Of Conduct complaints closed by PSOW related to Local Authority in 2022/23. This table shows both the volume, and the proportion that each outcome represents for the Local Authority.

Appendix F shows the outcomes of Code of Conduct complaints closed by PSOW related to Town and Community Councils in the Local Authority's area in 2022/23. This table shows both the volume, and the proportion that each outcome represents for each Town or Community Council.

ombwdsmon.cymru
holwch@ombwdsmon.cymru
0300 790 0203
1 Ffordd yr Hen Gae, CF 35 5LJ
Rydym yn hapus i dderbyn ac
ymateb i ohebiaeth yn y Gymraeg.

ombudsman.wales
ask@ombudsman.wales
0300 790 0203
1 Ffordd yr Hen Gae, CF 35 5LJ
We are happy to accept and respond
to correspondence in Welsh.

Summary of Ombudsman cases requiring Early Resolution / Voluntary Settlement

Service(s) & Reference	Summary of Complaint	Agreed Actions
<p>Porth Cynnal; Extended Support and Complaint Handling</p> <p>Case ref: 202200812</p>	<p>Complaint had previously been investigated independently under Stage 2; however, the complainant remained dissatisfied with the outcome.</p> <p>The complainant's main concerns were that the Service failed to undertake appropriate and necessary assessments to determine her relative's degree of learning disabilities, and that it failed to consider vital information provided during a telephone consultation.</p>	<p>The Ombudsman advised that the Council should respond to the additional queries raised by the complainant, following the independent investigation at Stage 2.</p>
<p>Porth Cynnal; Safeguarding and Complaint Handling</p> <p>Case Ref: 202201388</p>	<p>Complaint had previously been investigated independently under Stage 2. This process was unnecessarily protracted, and clarification was sought by the complainant regarding information that was included within the independent investigation report.</p> <p>In particular, the complainant wished to receive further information regarding the case law that was referred to, which the Social Worker had based their decision upon when providing care to the complainant's relative.</p>	<p>The Council agreed to provide additional information surrounding the case law that had been considered by the Social Worker at the time that decisions were made surrounding care provision.</p> <p>In addition, an earlier agreement to award a 'Time and Trouble' payment due to the lengthy complaints process, had been overlooked at the point that the formal response was issued. Therefore the Council honoured its earlier decision in this regard, and acknowledged the additional inconvenience caused by having to approach the Ombudsman to obtain the information requested.</p>
<p>Porth Cynnal; Extended Support</p> <p>Case Ref: 202200853</p>	<p>Complaint that the Council had failed to properly implement the terms of an Early Resolution agreement undertaken in September 2020. This included the Council's failure to fully complete a Carer's Assessment, and for the continuing uncertainty surrounding the terms and arrangements of Respite Care. The Complainant was also aggrieved that the Council appeared to take an inconsistent approach to Direct Payment uplift.</p>	<p>The Council agreed to follow up on the arrangements previously agreed in relation to conducting a Carer's Assessment. An Independent Social Worker was commissioned to complete this task.</p> <p>The Council also agreed to write to the complainant within six weeks to provide a full explanation regarding the Council's approach in respect of providing respite care.</p>

Service(s) & Reference	Summary of Complaint	Agreed Actions
<p>Porth Gofal; Integrated Triage & Assessment and Complaint Handling</p> <p>Case Ref: 202205115</p>	<p>Complaint regarding the Council’s failure to take seriously the concerns raised by the service-user about the care provider that was commissioned to assist her. The Complainant made a complaint directly to the care provider, but their response was incomplete and inaccurate.</p> <p>The Council declined to investigate the complaint because it was satisfied with the care provider's response and that no further action was needed. However, the Ombudsman disagreed – ruling that the Council did not fulfil its duty to accept the complaint in line with the Social Services Complaints Procedure (Wales) Regulations.</p>	<p>The Council agreed to contact the complainant to obtain her complaint and issue a response which was consistent with the statutory complaints procedure.</p>
<p>Porth Cynnal; Extended Support and Complaint Handling</p> <p>Case Ref: 202206613</p>	<p>Complainant contacted the Ombudsman because the Council had failed to investigate the complaints she had submitted in February 2022.</p>	<p>The Council accepted it had failed to investigate the complaints raised and agreed to commence Stage 1 of the complaints process immediately. An apology was also given for this failure in complaints handling and a redress payment was agreed in acknowledgement of the Time and Trouble the complaint went to in order to have her complaint considered.</p>
<p>Porth Gofal; Integrated Triage & Assessment Service & Complaint Handling</p> <p>Case Ref: 202202005</p>	<p>Complaint that the Council had failed to provide regular and meaningful updates regarding her complaint.</p>	<p>The Council agreed to issue a formal apology and an explanation for the delays she experienced during her complaint. It was also agreed that the formal response would be issued within four weeks of the Ombudsman’s decision, and a payment of £100 would be given in recognition of the time and trouble the complainant went to in making her complaint to the Ombudsman.</p>

Service(s) & Reference	Summary of Complaint	Agreed Actions
<p>Porth Cynnal; Extended Support and Complaint Handling</p> <p>Case Ref: 202107463</p>	<p>Following an independent investigation at Stage 2 of the Social Services Complaint Procedure, the complainant contacted the Ombudsman because the Council had failed to implement the recommendations made by the Independent Investigating Officer.</p> <p>In addition, the Council had failed to inform him that a full safeguarding investigation would not be taking place; though the issues identified during the complaint were considered during a Professional Concerns Meeting, under the All Wales Safeguarding Procedures.</p>	<p>By way of a Voluntary Settlement Agreement, the Ombudsman proposed that the Council and the Support Service that was involved in the original complaint, should meet with the complainant and his son (the service-user) formally to explain the safeguarding decision and to discuss any additional measures that would facilitate future learning.</p> <p>It was also agreed that a direct apology was warranted for the lack of communication following the conclusion of the Stage 2 investigation. The Council agreed with this proposal and the necessary actions were undertaken.</p>
<p>Policy, Performance & Public Protection: Complaint Handling</p> <p>Case Ref: 202201302</p>	<p>Complaint regarding the handling of a Freedom of Information request and a lack of response on the part of the Complaints and FOI Service.</p>	<p>Shortcomings in communication were as a consequence of capacity constraints within the Complaints and FOI Service. An apology and a full response was issued to the complainant as agreed by the Ombudsman.</p>
<p>Economy & Regeneration and Complaint Handling</p> <p>Case Ref: 202201085</p>	<p>Complaint regarding the Council's failure to respond to a complaint regarding noise nuisance.</p>	<p>The Council agreed to provide the complainant with an apology and an explanation for the delay in responding to her complaint and to open a new Planning Enforcement investigation file. The Council also agreed to commence an investigation by August 2022 and provide a response to the complainant outlining its findings.</p>
<p>Economy & Regeneration and Complaint Handling</p> <p>Case Ref: 202201596</p>	<p>Complaint regarding a lack of communication and Council's failure to update the complainant regarding her complaint about a retrospective planning application.</p>	<p>The Council acknowledged that it had not provided the complainant with updates on the progression of her complaint. The Council therefore agreed to the Ombudsman's Early Resolution proposal which outlined that it should apologise to the complainant for failing to provide regular and meaningful updates, provide an explanation for why this had happened and to provide the Stage 2 complaint response.</p>

Service(s) & Reference	Summary of Complaint	Agreed Actions
<p>Multi Service – including Complaints Handling</p> <p>Case Ref: 202108019</p>	<p>Complaint that the Council had failed to fully address all the issues referred to in her original complaint. Matters concerning Council Tax had been suitably addressed but her concerns about planning matters remained unanswered.</p>	<p>The Council agreed to provide a formal written response regarding the planning issues within a specific timeframe.</p>
<p>Porth Cynnal: Safeguarding Service and Complaint Handling</p> <p>Case Ref: 202107158</p>	<p>Complaint about the Council’s failure to close down a safeguarding case promptly, which had repercussions on the complainant’s ability to resume specific working responsibilities. The Complainant also stated that her complaint was not appropriately addressed once she had brought these matters to the Council’s attention.</p>	<p>The Council accepted full responsibility for the delays the complainant experienced in respect of the safeguarding case, and that this was further compounded by the failure to manage her complaint effectively. Further, the Council accepted it had not fully appreciated the impact that these matters had on the complainant.</p> <p>The Council agreed to provide a corporate apology for the maladministration identified by the Ombudsman and provide financial redress in the sum of £725 in recognition of the injustice that prevented her from returning to her duties within a youth organisation, and for the poor complaints handling – including the time and trouble invested by her, having to pursue her complaint.</p>
<p>Multi Service – including Complaints Handling</p> <p>Case Ref: 202108379</p>	<p>Complaint regarding the Council’s failure to adequately deal with a noise nuisance issue he had raised about a business operating from his neighbour’s home.</p>	<p>The Council accepted it had encountered delays in dealing with the complaint and agreed to the proposal outlined by the Ombudsman. This included issuing a formal apology and explanation for the complaint handling failures. Assurances were also given that processes were being reviewed to prevent such shortcomings in the future. It was also agreed that a formal Stage 2 response would be issued to the complainant within a specific timeframe.</p>

CEREDIGION COUNTY COUNCIL

Report to:	Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny
Date of meeting:	19/10/23
Title:	Banking Contract
Purpose of the report:	To provide an update on the Council's Banking Contract.

1. Background

The Council's banking contract provides for the transactional side of banking activity. This includes the provision of banking facilities (e.g. bank accounts and internet banking) to enable operational transactions for the Council's income and expenditure to be banked and accounted for.

The Council's wider investment approach (including counterparty considerations) are set by the annual Treasury Management Strategy which is considered by Full Council. The banking contract does not include Secure Collection services (e.g. cash / cheques) nor does it include Merchant services for online payment methods (e.g. debit / credit cards).

The Council's current provider is Barclays, with the current contract running until 29/02/24. Barclays is a UK based bank, with a long-term credit rating of A1 (Moody's) and has and continues to provide the Council with an excellent service. Barclays has operated local government sector specialism for over 15 years, currently providing transactional banking services to just under 25% of all local authorities and holding treasury relationships with close to 70% in the UK.

The current annual cost for Banking Services is in the region of £10k to £15k pa.

2. Procurement Process

The Council has advertised the new tender opportunity openly through Sell2Wales using etenderwales. This is the Welsh Government's procurement portal through which Welsh public services advertise contract opportunities. Any potential interested supplier who is registered on the portal and is interested in Banking Services will have received a notification of the Council's tender.

The tender was open for a period of 1 calendar month from 04/09/23 to 04/10/23 and a new contract is offered on a 7 year basis, with a further 2 year optional extension. There is a significant amount of operational work involved in changing banks, hence why there is a longer than average contract duration. The tender will be evaluated on the basis of a 30% Price / 70% Quality split with 200 marks available in total.

Whilst the focus in the quality criteria are predominantly core operational requirements including key matters such as cyber security and anti-fraud measures, weighting and attention is also given to Community Benefits (5 marks) and Environmental, Social & Governance matters (15 marks).

3. Current Position

At the time of writing, the tender has closed and 2 Suppliers have submitted a tender. The formal tender evaluation process will now be undertaken. Contract Procedure Rules prevent bidders' names being disclosed during the tender evaluation process.

Has an Integrated Impact Assessment been completed? No

If, not, please state why

Wellbeing of Future Generations:

Summary:
Long term: Not Applicable
Integration: Not Applicable
Collaboration: Not Applicable
Involvement: Not Applicable
Prevention: Not Applicable

Recommendations(s): 1. To note the update provided on the Council's Banking Services contract

Corporate Priorities: All

Financial & Procurement implications: F&P Budget

Statutory Powers:

Appendices: None

Corporate Lead Officer(s): Duncan Hall - Corporate Lead Officer: Finance and Procurement

Reporting Officers: Duncan Hall
Justin Davies
Mark Bridges
George Ryley

Date: 04/10/23

CYNGOR SIR CEREDIGION COUNTY COUNCIL

Report to: Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 19 October 2023

Title: Draft Forward Work Programme 2023/24

Purpose of the report: Review the current work programme of the Committee

Reason Scrutiny have requested the information:

The forward work programme of the Committee is reviewed and updated at each meeting

Background

Overview and Scrutiny Committees oversee the work of the Council to make sure that it delivers services in the best way and for the benefit of the local community.

The role of Overview and Scrutiny is to look at the services and issues that affect people in Ceredigion. The process provides the opportunity for Councillors to examine the various functions of the council, to ask questions on how decisions have been made, to consider whether service improvements can be put in place and to make recommendations to this effect.

Scrutiny plays an essential role in promoting accountability, efficiency and effectiveness in the Council's decision making process and the way in which it delivers services.

The main roles of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees:

- Holding the cabinet and officers as decision-makers to account
- Being a 'critical friend', through questioning how decisions have been made to provide a 'check and balance' to decision makers, adding legitimacy to the decision making process
- Undertaking reviews of council services and policy
- Undertaking reviews to develop council services and policies
- Considering any other matter that affects the county
- Ensuring that Ceredigion is performing to the best of its ability and delivering high quality services to its citizens
- Assessing the impact of the Council's policies on local communities and recommending improvement
- Engaging with the public to develop citizen centred policies and services

Effective Overview and Scrutiny can lead to:

- Better decision making

- Improved Service Delivery and Performance
- Robust Policy Development arising from public consultation and input of independent expertise
- Enhanced Democracy, Inclusiveness, Community Leadership and Engagement
- Adds a clear dimension of transparency and accountability to the political workings of the Council
- Provides an opportunity for all Members to develop specialist skills and knowledge that can benefit future policy making and performance monitoring processes
- Creates a culture of evidence based self-challenge

Current Situation

Questions to consider when choosing topics

- Is there a clear objective for examining this topic?
- Are you likely to achieve a desired outcome?
- What are the likely benefits to the Council and the citizens of Ceredigion?
- Is the issue significant?
- Are there links to the Corporate Strategy
- Is it a key issue to the public?
- Have the issues been raised by external audit?
- Is it a poor performing service?

Choosing topics

Overview and Scrutiny Committees should consider information from the Corporate Strategy, the Corporate Risk Register, budget savings – proposals and impact, Quarterly Corporate Performance Management panel meetings and departmental input in choosing topics and designing their Forward Work Programmes, as well as any continuing work.

Wellbeing of Future Generations:

Has an Integrated Impact Assessment been completed? If, not, please state why.

No

Summary of Integrated Impact Assessment:

Long term: N/A
Collaboration: N/A
Involvement: N/A
Prevention: N/A
Integration: N/A

Recommendation(s):

To review and update the current Forward Work Programme.

Contact Name: Dwynwen Jones

Designation: Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer

Date of Report: 10 October 2023

Acronyms:

FWP – Forward Work Programme

Committee	Item (description/title)	Invited Speakers	Purpose i.e. monitoring, policy, recommendation
Corporate Resources			
12 June 2023	SMART Towns Digital Connectivity update Engagement and Participation Plan Annual Report 2022-23	Arwyn Davies David Owen Cathryn Morgan	Chair's request Chair's request
19 July 2023	Menopause Policy Workforce Plan Update on Hybrid Working Update on Clic (requested) Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP)	Geraint Edwards Geraint Edwards Geraint Edwards/Russell Hughes-Pickering Joy Lake/Anna Gawthorpe Duncan Hall	Pre-Cabinet Pre-Cabinet Pre-Cabinet
19 October 2023	To Elect a vice-chairman for the remainder of the 2023/2024 municipal year with immediate effect Tackling Hardship Compliments, Complaints and Freedom of Information Reports Update on Banking Services Contract	 Cathryn Morgan Marie Neige-Hadfield/Alun Williams Duncan Hall	 Pre-Cabinet For info Chair requested following public request

7 December 2023	Engagement and Participation Strategy update monitoring report ICT and Digital Strategy Procurement and Commissioning Strategy	Cathryn Morgan Alan Morris Duncan Hall/George Ryley	Agreed at June's meeting to monitor progress 6 monthly Pre-Cabinet Pre-Cabinet
22 January 2024 SPECIAL	Invite to Openreach and Peter Williams, WG to update Committee on works planned/undertaken in County		
23 February 2024	Budget Preparation		
Special meeting to be arranged Feb/March 2024	Work Life/Balance Policy & Revised Annual Leave Policy Flexible Working to include Hybrid Working Policy Absence Policy	All Geraint Edwards	Pre-Cabinet
16 May 2024	Council Tax and Welfare Reform update	Ann Ireland	
Future meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Report on the Corporate Estate 		
Task and Finish	Ongoing		

County Farms	Next meeting November 8 th 2023 Council Chamber – not open to the public		
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Minutes of the Meeting of CORPORATE RESOURCES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

held Hybrid - Neuadd Cyngor Ceredigion, Penmorfa, Aberaeron / remotely via video conference on Wednesday, 19 July 2023

PRESENT; Councillor Rhodri Evans (Chair) Councillors Euros Davies, Endaf Edwards, Elaine Evans, Eryl Evans, Hugh R M Hughes, Ann Bowen Morgan, Caryl Roberts and Carl Worrall

Also in attendance: Councillor Catrin M S Davies, Bryan Davies , Gareth Davies and Matthew Vaux (Cabinet Members) together with Councillor Amanda Edwards and Elizabeth Evans

Officers in attendance:

Mr Eifion Evans, Chief Executive, Mr Geraint Edwards, Corporate Lead Officer -People & Organisation, Mrs Liz Merriman, Corporate Manager- Human Resources, Mr Russell Hughes-Pickering, Corporate Lead Officer- Economy & Regeneration, Mr Alan Morris, Corporate Lead Officer, Customer Contact & ICT, Mrs Joy Lake, Corporate Manager-Clic, ICT & Customer Services, Mr Duncan Hall, Corporate Lead Officer – Finance & Procurement, , Mr Mark Bridges, Service Manager-Projects & Accounts, Mrs Lisa Evans, Scrutiny Support & Standards Officer and Mrs Dana Jones, Democratic and Services Officer

(10:00am-2:20pm)

1 Welcome and Apologies

Councillor Ifan Davies, Gwyn Wigley Evans and Ceris Jones apologised for their inability to attend the meeting.

Councillor Paul Hinge apologised for his inability to attend the meeting as he was on other Council's adopted criteria.

2 Disclosures of personal interest (including whipping declarations)

Members are reminded of their personal responsibility to declare any personal and prejudicial interest in respect of matters contained in this agenda in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000, the Council's Constitution and the Members Code of Conduct. In addition, Members must declare any prohibited party whip which the Member has been given in relation to the meeting as per the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011.

None.

3 Draft Menopause Policy

Consideration was given to the Draft Menopause Policy presented by the Leader, Councillor Bryan Davies. It was reported that a Ceredigion County Council was committed to providing an inclusive and supportive working environment, where everyone was treated fairly with dignity and respect in

their working environment. It was also committed to the health, safety and wellbeing of the whole workforce.

Menopause was a natural part of ageing, commonly known as 'the change', and it refers to the point in time when periods had ceased for 12 months. It is not always an easy transition but with the right support it could be much better. Whilst not everyone going through the menopause suffer with symptoms, supporting those who do would improve their experience at work. It was estimated that in the UK around 1 in 3 people were either currently going through or had reached the menopause. Ceredigion County Council data in October 2022 records the corporate workforce (excluding schools) as 66.1% (1,355) female, 34.1% (698) of whom were between 45 and 64 and could be at an age where they were likely to be experiencing the perimenopause or had reached menopause. It was therefore important that consideration be given to the needs of this group and proactively manage an age diverse workforce.

The draft Menopause Policy had been developed to help those experiencing troublesome menopausal symptoms, and to support them, their colleagues and managers in tackling the occupational aspects of menopausal symptoms.

The policy aims to:

- Foster an environment in which employees can openly and comfortably instigate conversations or engage in discussions about menopause and feel confident to ask for support.
- Ensure everyone understands what menopause is, can confidently have good conversations, and were clear on the Council's policy and practices, supported by Human Resources (HR) and the Employee Health & Wellbeing Officer
- Educate and inform managers about the potential symptoms of menopause, and how they can support employees at work.
- Reduce absenteeism due to menopausal symptoms.
- Assure employees that County Council were responsible employer, committed to supporting their needs during menopause.

The policy sets out the roles and responsibilities of those involved in supporting affected employees within the workplace. It gives an overview of menopausal symptoms, their effect and offers guidance to employees and line managers of the support and information available to help them deal with the issues arising from the menopause.

The policy would be supported with further information and guidance on both the employee areas of CeriNet and practical help for managers on the CeriNet managers' toolkit. The People & Organisation Service would also be providing further support for those experiencing menopausal symptoms by:

- Providing a menopause café where employees could meet and gain mutual support and information. These sessions would be supported by the Employee Health & Wellbeing Officer.
- Provide menopause awareness training for Managers

Councillor Bryan Davies thanked Mr Alison Boshier, Secretary, Womens Officer for Unsiion Ceredigion for all her work in driving this policy for the Council together with the assistance of the Officers in the HR service.

Following questions from the floor, it was AGREED

- (i) to recommend to Cabinet the approval of the Menopause Policy;
- (ii) that consideration be given for a Menopause Champion for the Authority;
- (iii) that the Council promote the World Menopause Day in October ; and
- (vi) that a workshop be held for all Members and Managers to raise awareness of the Menopause

4 Review of Hybrid Working arrangements

The Leader, Councillor Bryan Davies presented the report and outlined the following in relation to the Hybrid Working arrangements :-

- Background
- Way We Work Project
- Hybird Working Strategy
- Interim Hybrid Working Policy
- Policy Headlines
- Review
- Line Managers

It was reported that the result for employees was similar to that of line managers with over 95% of employees agreeing that their hybrid working experience had been positive. Employees had made their preference clear. The financial benefit of hybrid working did not have as many employees choosing strongly agree but almost 80% of employees believe that it had benefitted them. When asked if they would consider alternative employment if their ability to work in a hybrid way was removed, 39% selected Yes; 24% selected No and the remaining 37% were Unsure.

The survey results were clear that from a line manager and employee perspective hybrid working was seen as a key benefit and retention tool. It was therefore recommended that hybrid working was accepted as a long term flexible working option and that the Interim Hybrid Working Policy should be revised to reflect this.

It was reported if the proposal to permanently adopt hybrid working option for employees was approved this would allow the release of office space which had not been fully utilised during the period of the interim hybrid working trial. The previous 12 months had shown that the current hybrid working desk capacity in Canolfan Rheidol and Penmorfa was capable of accommodating demand in its current form, accepting however that more permanent arrangements would be put in place in both locations. Over the twelve month period of the trial desk usage peaked in early December and it March 2023 for rooms booked. It was observed that the average usage over the winter months was higher than during the warmer summer months but remained within maximum capacity limits.

It was proposed that officers undertake a review of all Council office accommodation across its estate to identify potential for repurposing. The public engagement on future uses in Council offices resulted in several suggestions of possible usage including using building as facilities for the community, hospital or health care setting, spaces for businesses and residential accommodation.

Members raised concern regarding the perception of the public in relation to working for home and that work was not being carried out, however, this was not the case with Officers being far more productive, for example working during the time that they would usually be working to and from work and between meetings in various locations from their main office. It was agreed that this could be addressed by the Communication Service.

It was AGREED:-

- (i) to recommend to Cabinet to adopt hybrid working as a permanent option for employees able to work as efficiently remotely as in the office;
- (ii) to develop a Hybrid Working Policy to replace the current Interim Hybrid Working Policy and bring back to Scrutiny following consultation; and
- (iii) that the Hybrid work policy should include the requirement of managers to ensure that there was a weekly/bi-weekly or monthly physical team meeting

5 Draft Workforce Plan 2023-2028

The Leader, Councillor Bryan Davies presented the report upon the workforce plan that was a strategic document that outlines the Council's approach to managing its workforce to meet its current and future service delivery needs. It involves analysing the organisation's workforce requirements, identifying any gaps, and focussing on the development plans to address them.

Developing a workforce plan was essential for several reasons:

- **Strategic Alignment:** aligns human resources strategies with the Council's strategic goals. The plan allows the Council to identify critical roles, competencies, and skills required to achieve our corporate objective.
- **Recruitment and Retention:** provides an understanding of the skills and competencies needed to fill future roles. This would allow effective recruitment and retention strategies to be developed which would allow successful engagement with employees with a view to increasing motivation, reducing turnover rates and enhancing employee satisfaction.
- **Succession Planning:** enables the identification of critical posts and potential successors, allowing development, training and mentoring programmes or opportunities to mitigate risks associated with key employees leaving
- **Agility and Adaptability:** by anticipating future workforce needs and skills requirements, the Council could proactively address emerging challenges and capitalise on new opportunities.

As was the case for the 2017–2022 plan, a Strategic Workforce Planning toolkit was used to guide Corporate Lead Officer and their teams through the process. The toolkit assisted in analysing the current workforce before

extending that analysis to identify future workforce requirements, skills and competencies which would be needed to deliver new or improved services.

At the start of the year the People and Organisation Service met with each Service area to introduce the toolkit and to provide provided the workforce data to assist each service area in completing toolkit. This information was then collated, analysed and assessed in line with the workforce objectives within the Corporate Strategy and the requirements of the Sustainability Principles' five ways of working to develop key themes for the Workforce Plan 2023-2028.

The Workforce Plan 2023-2028 recognises the achievements over the course of the previous plan, the link with other corporate strategies, our workforce profile and sets out four key themed priorities to meet the identified challenges.

The four themed priorities set out in the plan were:

1. Realising Potential
2. Candidate Experience and Talent Attraction
3. New Ways of Working
4. Our Culture

The Workforce Plan 2023-2028 sets out an overview of each theme before detailing the actions which would be taken to meet the requirements of the Plan. A set of proposed measures were included at end of the document to allow effective monitoring of progress over the course of the three-year plan.

Following questions from the floor, it was AGREED to:-

- (i) recommend the approval of the Workforce Plan 2023-2028 by Cabinet; and
- (ii) to consider the possibility that apprentices should stay to work for a certain period of time with the Council following the end of their scheme, if the Council had contributed financially to that scheme

6 Update on Clic

Councillor Catrin M S Davies presented the report upon the Update on Clic. The following information was highlighted within the report:-

- Customer Services
- IT developments
- Corporatisation benefits and Strategy
- Statistics on the Clic System

Most of the Members stated that the Clic system worked well, however, it would improve if all services would respond to queries in a timely manner. Councillor Carl Worrall stated that system did not work for him as it had taken months to resolve several issues in his Ward. Councillor Caryl Roberts stated that Corporate Lead Officers were either Steve Jobs or Rodney Trotter when using this system; and that it was not acceptable that a reminder should be sent to them if the issue/query had not been resolved within two weeks, as it should have been addressed sooner. She stated that

she had no issues with the front-line employees on Clic and welcomed this CRM system.

Concerns were also raised by Councillor Roberts that all Members were informed following the first meeting after the election by the Chief Executive that Members should not contact any officers direct in relation to issues, only the Corporate Lead Officers, Corporate Manager, or himself. She stated that she had collated information from Members from other Local Authorities on this issue and that they were allowed to contact officers on all levels direct. She stated that all Members and all Officers should be working together for their communities and as Team Ceredigion. The Corporate Lead Officer - Clic, ICT & Customer Services stated that the Rodney Trotter comment was unfair as officers were working hard in the background to address the backlog.

In response the Chief Executive stated that he was very disappointed with the comments of Councillors in relation to this matter and their unprofessionalism in relation to Corporate Lead Officers in a public forum and expected an apology by the end of the meeting, all Members and Officers should be polite and courteous to each other. All Members could contact the CLO direct to contact officers in their service if a response had not been received in an appropriate timeline. This process had been agreed following the last administration whereby Members had been vocally abusive to junior employees, which was totally unacceptable. The Clic system had been created in order that all queries/issues were logged and addressed accordingly, if Members were dissatisfied with the delay in dealing with the issue they must then contact a CLO so that senior officers follow up any concerns on their behalf. The principle was simple, stated the CEO – log a request for service on Clic; contact a CLO, Corporate Director or CEO if there was an unreasonable delay in actioning the request. If you required information and it was not a request for service please e-mail Senior and middle officers for advice. He also stated that there were 750 less employed in the Council to provide over 120 services, therefore this has had an impact on capacity to deal immediately with every enquiry. However, his and every other senior officer door was always open to members and to note this had always been the message.

The Leader stated he welcomed the comments on the need to improve the Clic system, however, the Rodney Trotter comment was not acceptable. Councillor Caryl Roberts stated that her comment had been taken out of context, but however, stood by her statement in relation to being able to contact all officers direct as Councillors in recent administrations had been able to do so.

It was AGREED -

- (i) to note the report for information; and
- (ii) that Members received training on My account and how to drop a pin to a map to ascertain an exact location of an issue, would be arranged in due course

7 **Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)**

Councillor Gareth Davies presented the report on the Medium Term Financial Strategy. The Corporate Lead Officer: Finance & Procurement then gave an overview of the key considerations and also confirmed that a Budget Workshop was being arranged for Members in September in order to kickstart the 2024/25 Budget Process.

The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) is generally updated on an annual basis. Due to the unprecedented challenge of the 2023/24 Budget setting process, it was not possible to update the MTFS during the Budget process, as all energies were diverted into setting a balanced budget for 2023/24.

The MTFS should not be seen as a formal detailed budget or a tablet of stone, it instead provides an overarching approach that the Council will need to adopt in aiming to achieve its priorities, including taking account of the external legislative, economic environment and indicative projected spending pressures and funding over the period.

The MTFS had therefore been refreshed and now covers 2023/24 to 2026/27. It includes an Executive Summary that covers the key matters contained within the detailed MTFS.

Members attention was particularly drawn to:

- Executive Summary
- The Council's Budget Priorities and the link between the MTFS and the Corporate Strategy 2022 – 2027 and its associated Corporate Wellbeing Objectives
- Indicative Budget Cost Pressures
- Budget Gap scenarios looking at different levels of indicative Council Tax and WG funding
- Sensitivity Analysis of different Budget Variables
- Appendix 1 - Doing things Differently: A Corporate Approach

It was reported that following consideration and feedback from the Committee, the aim was to table the MTFS at Cabinet on 05/09/23 and then Full Council on 14/09/23

Members were generally complimentary of the refreshed and updated MTFS, commenting that it was well presented and relatively straightforward to follow and understand. A range of questions were asked on matters including WG's proposals for a Discretionary Visitor Levy, the post EU funding landscape, the current position on Staff Payawards and the expiry of the Penweddig PFI scheme.

Councillor Elizabeth Evans also provided the Corporate Lead Officer with a list of questions for further consideration at the Budget Workshop.

It was AGREED to note the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy.

8 To confirm minutes of the previous meeting and to consider any matters arising from those Minutes.

It was AGREED to note the Forward Work Programme subject to considering a Communication protocol between Councillors and officers

9 Forward work Programme

It was agreed to confirm the minutes of the meeting of the previous meeting as a true record.

Confirmed at the Meeting of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 19 October 2023

Chairman: _____

Date: _____