

Meeting of:	GOVERNANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE
Date of Meeting:	30 JANUARY 2025
Report Title:	CORPORATE COMPLAINTS
Report Owner / Corporate Director:	CHIEF OFFICER – FINANCE, HOUSING AND CHANGE
Responsible Officer:	PHILIP O'BRIEN GROUP MANAGER – TRANSFORMATION, CUSTOMER SERVICES AND PARTNERSHIPS
Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:	There is no impact on the policy framework or procedure rules
Executive Summary:	This report provide an update following a review of how Stage 1 and Stage 2 corporate complaints are recorded and reported corporately (excluding complaints relating to Social Services)

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update to the Governance and Audit Committee on the current process and a proposal on the way all corporate complaints will be monitored, recorded and reported going forward.

2. Background

- 2.1 A report was presented to the Governance and Audit Committee on 9th September 2021 to note the Authority's corporate complaints process and to determine whether the Committee wished to make any recommendations in relation to the Authority's ability to handle complaints effectively.
- 2.2 The recommendation from this Committee was to set up a Working Party to ensure all complaints are monitored and recorded accurately to ensure complaints were not being under recorded.
- 2.3 A small Working Party was established consisting of the Corporate Complaints team and the digital platform design team to explore opportunities for using a single system to record all complaints.
- 2.4 A further meeting was held with each Directorate's Business Manager to review the way complaints are currently being monitored and recorded. Each Directorate already has an established process in place that is bespoke to each Directorate, to record and report on complaints received. Nevertheless, there is close collaboration between each Directorate and with the Authority's central complaint function managed by the Information Team within Legal Services, to ensure that any

Directorate complaint escalated through the corporate complaints procedure is managed centrally.

- 2.5 Schools are their own data controllers for the purposes of the Data Protection Act 2018 and therefore manage and retain this data themselves. However, complaints received from schools are recorded centrally by the Education and Family Support Directorate.
- 2.6 During the discussion, it was evident that significant development would be required to change current operational processes within each Directorate in order to develop a single system to record all complaints across the Council.
- 2.7 A further report was submitted to Governance and Audit Committee on 1st June 2023 where it was agreed that all complaints data would be collated centrally to present to the Committee on an annual basis, without the need to develop a single corporate complaints computerised system.

3. Current situation/ proposal

3.1 Following an internal audit of the corporate complaints process, a report was produced in July 2024 with the following recommendations:

- In line with the Council's commitment to dealing effectively with complaints and concerns, it should be a mandatory requirement for all officers who are responsible for complaint handling to complete the Corporate Complaints e-learning module.
- To achieve consistencies in approach, and to ensure complete and accurate data is collated and recorded for reporting purposes, documented procedures should be created for the Information Team.
- Further efforts should be made to deal with complaints and respond to customers within target dates. Where persistent underperformance and non-compliance is identified, targeted training for complaint handlers should be considered.
- In order to capture valuable data for the purpose of internal analysis and potential service improvement, the importance of recording information in relation to lessons learned, regardless of the outcome of the complaint, is communicated to key stakeholders including complaint handlers.
- Processes that enable customers to log compliments should be established with guidance available online via the Council website.
- To allow effective monitoring of Corporate Complaints across the Authority, regular performance information should be provided to senior management / Corporate Management Board (CMB) in line with arrangements agreed with Governance and Audit Committee. Consideration should be made to:
 - incorporating data already reported to Public Services Ombudsman for Wales into the process
 - the addition of complaints related performance indicators into the Corporate Plan Delivery Plan if considered appropriate by Corporate Overview Scrutiny Committee

3.2 The contract for the digital platform was renewed in April 2024 and the new contract included an annual customer experience consultancy review where the digital provider Granicus would undertake a process review to develop a new way of working

by designing a custom solution to improve customer engagement and drive efficiency. In light of the recent internal audit, it was decided to revisit the corporate complaints process to explore the possibility of developing a central complaints process and system.

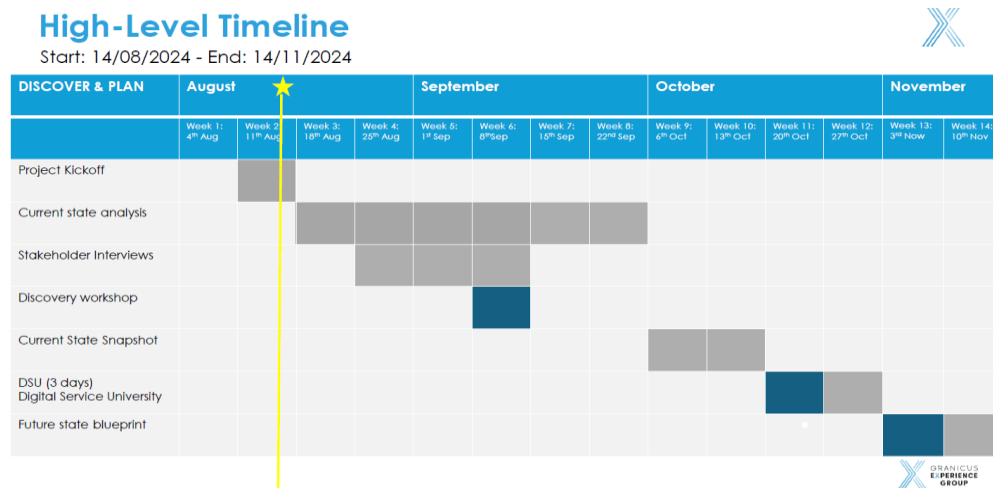
3.3 Due to Social Services complaints being dealt with under different procedures, it was agreed with the central Information team that the review would focus on corporate complaints relating to the other Directorates initially.

3.4 A review of the current corporate complaint system and process commenced in August 2024 and included:

- Two hour discovery workshop
- Stakeholder interviews
- A current state analysis including the mapping of the customer journey and other experience and performance data
- Weekly status reviews meeting to monitor progress
- A 3-day in-person workshop to review process and develop a blueprint, including future state mapping

Based on the analysis of the current complaints received, this review consisted of Officers across the Authority from a variety of service areas including the central Information team, transformation and customer service teams, Education, Highways, Planning, Waste and Recycling and Parks and Green Spaces.

The timeline for the review is shown below:



3.5 Following the review, a new way of working and system will be developed to improve the current process and system, as well as address the recommendations identified in the recent audit, namely:

- Ensure all complaint handlers have undertaken the Corporate Complaints e-learning module prior to be set up on the system to respond to complaints
- Develop a consistent way of working to collate, record and report complaints and compliments as well as documenting working procedures to support all Officers involved in the complaint's process
- Improve the process for customers to make both complaints and compliments
- Incorporate an improved triage and escalation process

- Incorporate both Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints within the same system
- Improve customer feedback and communication
- Automate elements of the process where possible to streamline whole process from beginning to end
- Develop the process to ensure all feedback is captured and recorded, including whether the complaint was upheld or not, and any steps taken in relation to lessons learnt
- Review and develop relevant monitoring reports.

3.6 Whilst most of the Audit's recommendations have been addressed by the central Information team, the recommendations will also be considered as part of the new system build to ensure consistency. This will ensure full audit compliance will be adhered to without relying on Officers to manually undertake certain tasks.

3.7 There is currently confusion over what a complaint is, so the new process and system will also be built to adhere to the complaint definition which was agreed as part of the review by the working group:

- Failure of service. The service has had the opportunity to rectify but didn't do what they said they would do;
- Policy or legislation has not been followed;
- A complaint can be made within six months of the customer becoming aware of the issue;
- Inappropriate behaviour of a member of staff.

3.8 The new process will be incorporated within the the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system that is in use in Customer Services for recording customer service requests. A robust reporting tool would also need to be developed to ensure sets of data could be provided to various bodies, including the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (quarterly), ensuring all reports provided the relevant information for each.

3.9 As the new corporate complaints process will be incorporated within the existing CRM system, it will have the functionality to allow customers to log complaints themselves, as well as enable BCBC staff to enter any complaints from residents who choose to contact us across other channels such as the telephone and in writing. The new system will include an improved communication mechanism to ensure customers are kept updated on the progress of their complaint automatically.

3.10 Developing the new process and system will also enable the complaints data to be analysed as a means of identifying potential areas for improvement and from this to establish areas for further learning and development. This will include:

- Issues that have arisen more than once
- Complaints regarding systems or control that have resulted in changes being made
- Complaints raised about services that have resulted in change
- Lessons learned from complaints received

3.11 A new project team group will be established in January 2025 to consist of Officers across the organisation to start scoping the development project. Therefore a timeline to develop this solution is yet to be established and will depend on the

complexity of the process based on individual service needs, however it is envisaged that the project will likely take approximately 5-6 months.

- 3.12 Once the new system has been built, tested and gone live with corporate complaints, there will also be further opportunities to look at expanding it to include Social Services' complaints, Freedom of Information and Subject Access Requests, so all information is held within the one system.

4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)

- 4.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh Language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. This is an information report, therefore it is not necessary to carry out an Equality Impact assessment in the production of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives

- 5.1 The well-being goals identified in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 were considered in the preparation of this report. The monitoring of corporate complaints and the successful resolution of those complaints is consistent with the five ways of working within the Act as it supports the provision of high quality and more effective services to the public across all service areas. In addition, it enables each service to focus on areas of concern, to improve services and to monitor performance, ensure that any trends are identified and dealt with to be avoided in the future and to ensure that complaints are dealt with consistently and fairly across all service areas.

By managing complaints effectively through to successful resolution, this assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objectives:

- A County Borough where we protect our most vulnerable
- A County Borough where we help people meet their potential
- A County Borough where people feel valued, heard and part of their community
- A County Borough where we support people to live healthy and happy lives

6. Climate Change Implications

- 6.1 Reviewing, improving and streamlining business processes is important to help protect and sustain the environment over the long term and in line with our climate change ambitions.

7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications

- 7.1 All complaints received where there is safeguarding concern will be managed under Bridgend County Borough Council's Safeguarding Policy. This will safeguard and promote the wellbeing of children, young people and adults at risk of abuse or neglect

and to ensure that effective practices are in place throughout the Council and its commissioned services.

8. Financial Implications

- 8.1 There are no financial implications arising out of this report as the system will be developed using current resources and will be reviewed as part of the corporate approach to transformation.

9. Recommendation

- 9.1 The Committee is recommended to note the recent review of the corporate complaints process and the upcoming development of a new process and digital solution.

Background documents

None