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Ask for: Communications

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Date: 17 August 2023

 Communications
@ombudsman.wales

Cllr. Anthony Hunt
Torfaen County Borough Council
By Email only: anthony.hunt@torfaen.gov.uk

Annual Letter 2022/23

Dear Councillor Hunt

I am pleased to provide you with the Annual letter (2022/23) for Torfaen County Borough 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.

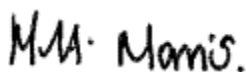
We continued our work to publish complaints statistics into a second year, with data now published twice a year. This data allows us to see information with greater context – for example, last year 11% of Torfaen County Borough Council's complaints were referred to PSOW.

I would encourage Torfaen County Borough 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. Stephen Vickers, Chief Executive, Torfaen County Borough Council.
By Email only: stephen.vickers@torfaen.gov.uk



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

Torfaen County Borough Council	Complaints Received	% share
Adult Social Services	2	13%
Benefits Administration	0	0%
Children's Social Services	1	6%
Community Facilities, Recreation and Leisure	0	0%
Complaints Handling	4	25%
Covid19	0	0%
Education	2	13%
Environment and Environmental Health	3	19%
Finance and Taxation	1	6%
Housing	2	13%
Licensing	1	6%
Planning and Building Control	0	0%
Roads and Transport	0	0%
Various Other	0	0%
Total	16	

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Appendix C - Complaint Outcomes
(* denotes intervention)

Torfaen County Borough Council		% Share
Out of Jurisdiction	1	6%
Premature	7	41%
Other cases closed after initial consideration	8	47%
Early Resolution/ voluntary settlement*	1	6%
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	17	

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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%



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Appendix E - Code of Conduct Complaints

		Torfaen County Borough Council
Investigations	Decision not to investigate	10
	Discontinued	1
	No evidence of breach	0
	No action necessary	0
	Refer to Adjudication Panel	0
	Refer to Standards Committee	0
	Total	11

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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
Henllys Community Council	1	0	0	0	0	0	1

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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.

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