

Wiltshire Council

Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee

26 September 2023

Standards Committee

3 October 2023

Wiltshire Council Annual Complaints Report 2022-23

Purpose

1. To present the Wiltshire Council Annual Complaints Report 2022-23 (Appendix 1).

Background

2. The Annual Complaints Report provides a detailed picture of the council's complaints activity between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023. The report does not cover complaints about elected members and the Wiltshire Police and Crime Commissioner, which are reported separately to Standards Committee and the Police and Crime Panel respectively.
3. The Annual Complaints Report presents information about:
 - How promptly complaints were responded to and resolved;
 - How many potential complaints were triaged and resolved informally as service requests;
 - How many complaints and service requests were received overall;
 - Which services we received complaints about;
 - The underlying factors behind identified complaint trends and the measures in place to address them;
 - The outcome of complaints;
 - How many complaints were received, investigated and upheld by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO);
 - How complainants choose to submit their complaints.
4. The Annual Complaints Report presents data covering the last five years to illustrate any trends across these measures.

Main Considerations

Annual Complaints Report headlines

5. The key headlines are:
 - Complaints have **increased** by 12% since 2021-22, ending the gradual decline seen since 2018-19. A rise in complaints received relating to the

council's Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) & Inclusion service more than accounts for this overall increase.

- Complaints resolved as 'service requests' **increased** by 35% to 1,787.
 - The number of complaints resolved at Stage 1 of the corporate Complaints Procedure continues to steadily **decrease**.
 - The number of complaints resolved at Stage 2 of the corporate Complaints Procedure has **increased** by 43% since 2021-22.
 - The service areas attracting the highest numbers of **formal complaints** were:
 1. **Children's Services**¹ (148) – an increase of 68% on the previous year and the highest annual total over the last five years.
 2. **Adult Social Care** (74)² – an increase of 16% on the previous year, ending the gradual decline seen since 2018.
 3. **Development and Building Control** (60) – a decrease of 15% on the previous year.
 - The service areas attracting the highest numbers of complaints that were **resolved informally** (i.e. as **service requests**) were:
 1. **Waste Management** (387) – an increase of 51% on the previous year
 2. Highways, Transport and Streetscene (307) – an increase of 31% on the previous year
 3. **Housing** (195) – an increase of 40% on the previous year.
 - There was small **increase** to the percentage of complaints upheld or partially upheld by the council.
6. The report refers to the findings presented in the LGSCO's Annual Review Letter 2022-23 for Wiltshire Council (**Appendix 2**). The annual letters provide a breakdown of the Ombudsman's investigations and findings during the year. The 2022-23 letter shows that:
- There was a 10% **increase** in the number of complaints about the council received by the LGSCO, but a **decrease** in those requiring investigation.
 - The percentage of complaints about the council upheld by the LGSCO **decreased** by 2%, while the percentage of complaints upheld about other unitary councils **increased** by 8%
 - The council paid £8,750 in financial remedies following recommendations from the LGSCO, £6,900 of which related to delays in the issuing of Emotional Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).

¹ Throughout the report, 'Children's Services' refers to the Children and Families, and Education and Skills directorates.

² Throughout the report, 'Adult Social Care' refer to the Ageing and Living Well, and Wholelife Pathway directorates.

- The council complied with **all** LGSCO recommendations following upheld complaints .

Issues identified

7. The analysis and reporting of complaints activity is an important part of a learning culture for the organisation. Without a detailed picture of complaints activity, elected members and officers are less able to identify and address issues with service delivery.
8. Under the section ‘What did we receive complaints about?’, the Annual Report breaks down the complaints received regarding key services. It highlights specific issues experienced by some services in 2022-23 including:
 - A significant increase in complaints about SEND & Inclusion services, specifically in regard to Educational Health and Care Plans (EHCPs);
 - An increase in complaints about Adult Social Care;
 - Several services that, while they do not attract a significant number of formal complaints, create comparatively high numbers of complaints ultimately resolved as service requests (e.g. Waste, Highways, Streetscene & Transport and Housing).
9. The Annual Report includes information about the factors behind these trends and the actions in place to address them.

Improvements to the council's complaints handling function

10. To further enhance the council's complaint handling function, the following actions are planned for the next 12 months:
 - A new complaints casework management system is being developed by ICT and will enable more comprehensive reporting to support officers to identify and resolve emerging issues promptly.
 - The Complaints team are now delivering training for service teams in complaint handling and developing council-wide guidance. Of particular focus is supporting all services to:
 - a. **Increase** the percentage of complaints resolved early and informally;
 - b. **Decrease** the percentage of complaints progressing to Stage 2 by providing comprehensive Stage 1 responses that include remedies where appropriate;
 - c. **Increase** the percentage of Stage 1 complaint responses provided within timescales;
 - d. **Increase** the percentage of complaints received by the LGSCO where it determines that the council has already provided a satisfactory remedy.

Proposals

11. To note the Wiltshire Council Annual Complaints Report 2022-23

12. To note the actions to further improve the council's complaints handling function over the next 12 months.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Wiltshire Council Annual Complaints Report 2022-23

Appendix 2 Wiltshire Council's Annual Review Letter 2022-23 – Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman