

## **Wiltshire Council**

### **Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee**

**28 September 2022**

### **Standards Committee**

**5 October 2022**

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## **Wiltshire Council Annual Complaints Report 2021-22**

### **Purpose**

1. To present the Wiltshire Council Annual Complaints Report 2021-22 (**Appendix 1**).

### **Background**

2. The Annual Complaints Report provides a detailed picture of the council's complaints activity between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022. 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;
  - The demographics of residents who submitted complaints.
4. The Annual Complaints Report presents data covering the last four years to illustrate any trends across these measures.

### **Main Considerations**

#### Annual Complaints Report headlines

5. The key headlines are:

- The gradual **reduction** in complaints received over the past four years has continued;
  - The number of complaints handled at Stage 1 of the corporate Complaints Procedure continues to steadily **decrease**;
  - The number of complaints handled at Stage 2 of the corporate Complaints Procedure is **stable**;
  - The number of complaints handled through the statutory Adult Social Care and statutory Children's complaints procedures is **stable**;
  - There was **small increase** to the percentage of complaints upheld or partially upheld by the council;
  - The service areas attracting the highest numbers of complaints were:
    1. Children's Services (88) – an increase on the previous year, but decrease on the two years before that;
    2. Development and Building Control (71) – a fairly small increase on the four previous years;
    3. Adult Social Care (64) – continuing the steady reduction seen over the past four years.
  - The service areas attracting the highest numbers of potential complaints that were resolved informally (i.e. complaints resolved as service requests) were:
    1. Waste Management (256);
    2. Highways and Transport (234);
    3. Housing (135).
6. The report refers to the findings presented in the LGSCO's Annual Review Letter 2021-22 for Wiltshire Council (**Appendix 2**). The annual letters provide a breakdown of the Ombudsman's investigations and findings during the year. The 2021-22 letter shows that:
- There was a slight **increase** in complaints about the council received by the LGSCO, but a **decrease** on all three years prior to that;
  - The LGSCO decided to investigate **more** complaints about the council than in 2020-21, when the LGSCO temporarily paused investigative work during the Covid-19 pandemic;
  - The LGSCO upheld a **smaller** percentage of complaints about the council than they upheld about other unitary councils;
  - **All** LGSCO recommendations to the council were complied with.

#### 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 2021-22, including:
  - An increase in complaints about SEND services;
  - An increase in complaints about Passenger Transport;
  - Several services that, while they do not attract a significant number of formal complaints, create comparatively high numbers of complaints that are ultimately resolved informally as service requests (e.g. Waste and Highways & Transport).
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 complaint case management system, enabling more efficient and detailed reporting of complaints activity;
  - Improvements to the council's complaints webpages to provide clearer guidance to members of the public; and
  - Improved corporate guidance for council officers on effective complaints handling procedures.

#### **Proposals**

11. To note the Wiltshire Council Annual Complaints Report 2021-22.
12. To note that formal complaints to the council have reduced by 41% since 2018-19.
13. 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 2021-22

Appendix 2 Wiltshire Council's Annual Review Letter 2021-22 – Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman