

CABINET REPORT	23 July 2019
SUBJECT	Complaints and Service Improvement Annual Report 2017/18 and 2018/19
CABINET MEMBER	CLlr Nia Jeffreys, Cabinet Member – Corporate Support
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1 Purpose of the report

The Report summarises developments in *Complaints and Service Improvement* over the two years from 2017-2019. A report was not submitted for 2017-2018 because of restructuring the services, teams and roles.

The report emphasises the responses to complaints, in order to improve the service, and shows successes through narrative in the report. Obstacles to overcome are also highlighted in order to continue to improve and develop, likewise are the proposed steps.

The Cabinet receives this report as part of the Council's Complaints and Concerns Policy.

2 Decision sought

To accept the report

3 Background

3.1 The procedure adopted by the Council is in accordance with the Model Concerns and Complaints Policy and the Guidance published by Welsh Government, and produced under the supervision of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. This is advantageous as it is consistent with the complaint procedures of other public bodies, making it easier for members of the public to submit complaints across public organisations.

3.2 The procedure was adopted by the Cabinet with the following aims:

- Providing a specific benefit for the citizen by focusing on the solution rather than the process. It will allow for complaints to be dealt with more swiftly, by removing one step of the current process, which is fairly laborious and lengthy.
- It will allow complaints which involve more than one department to be better coordinated, and will enable the coordination of complaints which involve external agencies or partners.
- By establishing a central, comprehensive database, it will be possible to keep an overview of the pattern of complaints and to learn lessons as an organisation.
- It is anticipated that the procedure will be better aligned with the Council's new culture of empowering staff to make decisions and to deliver one of the work streams of the "Ffordd Gwynedd" project.

The Procedure

3.3 A complaint is defined as follows:

- an expression of dissatisfaction or concern
- either made in writing or verbally or by any other means of communication
- made by one or more members of the public
- it is in relation to how the Council has acted or failed to act
- or it is regarding the standard of service provided
- and there is a need to respond to it.

A complaint is not:

- an initial request for service, such as informing about a faulty street light
- an appeal against a decision that has been 'made appropriately'
- a way of seeking a change in legislation or a policy decision that 'has been made appropriately'
- a way for lobbying groups/organisations to promote their case.

This procedure is not relevant to users of social services as there is a statutory procedure for them. Schools also operate their own complaints arrangements.

There are two steps to the procedure:

Informal Resolution

3.4 This step offers the complainant an opportunity for informal contact at the place where the service is provided in order to seek a resolution to complaints either as the concern arises or very soon thereafter. Dealing with complaints should be an integral part of service provision and staff are encouraged to consider whether the complaint can be resolved 'there and then'.

3.5 The aim of the procedure is to provide a system that is simple, flexible and places an emphasis on reaching the most appropriate outcome for individuals and services. The arrangements allows the Council to deal with concerns in a far more proactive way by focusing on people's needs. This means solving the problem rather than focusing on the complaints procedure itself.

Formal investigation

3.6 If is not possible to resolve the complaint informally, the complainant can refer it for a formal investigation. *"Investigate once, investigate well"* is the principle for this step of the process. The emphasis is given on one investigation to thoroughly deal with the concerns raised. Usually, an officer within the department who is sufficiently senior and who is independent from the source of the complaint will usually carry out the investigation. From time to time, this will not be appropriate and the complaint will be investigated by an officer who is independent from the department in question. Unlike informal resolutions, all formal complaints are centrally recorded.

3.7 The complainant may take the complaint to the Ombudsman if dissatisfied with the Council's formal response.

3.8 Overview of the steps.

- Complaints come in from various directions - On-line Praise and Complaints form; via e-mail or letter; over the phone; through workplace visits; or through a message from a colleague;
- The Complaints Box is monitored throughout the day and every effort is made not to have complaints awaiting without having passed them on for attention;
- Every complaint that is submitted through the Complaints Box is recorded under its relevant category, as follows: Formal, Informal, or Ombudsman. The name and address of the complainant, if known, and the date the complaint was received and the category to which it belongs are noted;
- Every effort is made to acknowledge a complaint on the day it comes in, wherever possible, if this is a normal working day. An e-mail or letter is sent to confirm receipt. The complaint will then be passed on to the relevant service for attention;
- The SIO, or colleague in his/her absence, monitors the date of response to the complaint and will remind the Service of the requirement to respond promptly where possible. They are also asked to inform the customer if likely to fail to respond in time;
- A report is presented to the Corporate Management Team every six months explaining the way services could be improved as a result of the complaints that are received. Also, in accordance with the procedure, an annual report must be submitted to the Cabinet.

The emphasis is now on Service Improvement after complaints are received, in order to avoid such a complaint in future.

We aim to discover whether any patterns or trends are emerging.

By now, the report focuses on Valid Formal Complaints and Ombudsman Complaints, as Services deal with informal complaints themselves.

A 'valid complaint' means that there are valid grounds for the complaint, and if it is not satisfactorily resolved it could then become a complaint for the Ombudsman

	2017/18 Numbers	Numbers 2018/19
Type of Complaints	Total	Total [1]
Formal Complaints (Valid)	32	49
Complaints for the Ombudsman	24 18 No Investigation 4 No Investigation (Premature) 0 No response 0 Settlement 0 Open investigation 2 Reports	32 16 No Investigation 9 No Investigation (Premature) 0 No response 5 Settlement 0 Open investigation 2 Reports[2]

No Investigation means that the Ombudsman, after initial consideration, is satisfied with the way the Authority has dealt with the matter and no further investigation is required. It could also be a matter beyond its jurisdiction.

Premature means that the Ombudsman believes that the Authority has not yet been given the opportunity to consider the matter. These would usually be referred to the Council for consideration, usually under the complaints procedure.

4. Service Improvement

As previously reported, the Services' have cooperated well with the procedure in general, and in fact several have mentioned that they have found the procedure to be very valuable.

Section 1 contains examples of the complaints received and provides detail about:

- The way services try to satisfy those who have submitted complaints
- Steps taken to consequently improve services.

Before introducing the procedure in 2015, the length of time for complaints to be open was not measured. Since then, we have developed a procedure to measure the average time that complaints are open. The figure for 2018/19 is 8.6 days. Our intention for the future is to use this as a baseline for comparison and to provide an additional performance measure.

It must be noted that the number of complaints received by a service does not necessarily reflect the standard of service provided and these results cannot be considered in isolation. The nature of the services provided heavily influence results. Among the factors that could have an impact on the figures are the rate of direct contact with customers, the service's public profile, or whether an individual has other formal ways of rectifying issues or submitting an appeal. In order to illustrate the context, please bear in mind the number of times each day the Council's Services and the public have contact in order to provide a service, compared with the number of complaints received.

5 Looking to the Future/Next Steps

Services will be informed, when attending Management Team meetings, that the Team is able to provide customer care training, using complaints as a learning tool. Services will be advised about the type of training held with the Leisure Service.

The Successes Wall is in the process of being created and will be set up shortly. Section 2 contains examples of the types of comments received.

These comments have come from the praise received by customers on the praise form on our website. Via e-mail or letters, or over the telephone. Positive feedback is also received following a complaint, and the feeling is that it is very important to celebrate and share this positive feedback/praise among the services. The document will be on "Wordpress" and will be uploaded onto the Intranet. It will also be available for field staff via a link to the Council staff Facebook page. Much of the praise is about our field staff and we believe it is important to celebrate this and ensure they are seen. This is certainly a way of raising staff morale, when they feel appreciated. Discussions are in the pipeline with the Internal Communication Team about how to use the successes wall to coincide with the Council at its Best Awards.

The SIO and Organisational Learning and Development Manager mention the Successes Wall when meeting the Service Management Teams, and the many comments received by the Services directly praising them are forwarded to the SIO's attention.

The Management Team has seen many examples in the past where we have experienced problems with some Services' responses to the procedure and some elements persist in these Services. If things do not change we will seek the support of the Management Team in an attempt to move things on further.

Section 1

Examples of some complaints received over the two years 2017/18 and 2018/19

1.1 Corporate Support (Customer Care)

1.1.1 Nature of the Complaint

A customer who was attempting to renew a Post-16 Travel Pass on-line submitted a complaint. Unable to complete the renewal process for the ticket for some reason. This meant a failure to receive the pass on time. The customer was, therefore, obligated to pay an additional fare to travel on the train. Lack of clear communication between the Council and bus company. Another customer who had experienced similar problems enquired about the same matter. This customer did not wish to make a complaint about the issue but was grateful that the service was already looking into the process.

1.1.2 Service's Response/Service Improvement

The Service investigated two cases and found that a fault existed in the on-line renewal/payment process. Apologies were issued to the customer, together with an explanation of what had gone amiss.

1.1.3. Lessons Learnt

Service's Comments

The service had arranged for the Post-16 Travel Passes to be put on an FFOS priority list. This meant that the process would be reviewed with the end of August as the set target for the new procedure to be operational on FFOS. Until the change ensues, the Team Leader will monitor the situation with the aim of preventing another customer from experiencing the same problem.

The Service also held discussions with the company in order to improve future communication.

Furthermore, the matter was discussed with the Education Department and that Service agreed to refund the customer for the additional costs incurred because of the problem.

1.2. Waste and Recycling Service

1.2.1 Nature of the Complaint

A customer had complained about losing 3 sets of recycling bins over the past 3 months. Consequently, the customer was unable to properly recycle waste. The customer claimed that the bins were not being returned to their rightful places by the collectors, and that they were being left at the end of the street. The collections were every fortnight anyway, and this created problems as the house lacked space in which to store them

1.2.2 Service's Response/Service Improvement

The Team Leader had a word with the collectors noting that they would monitor the situation for a while.

1.2.3 Lessons Learnt

Service's Comments:

The Refuse/Recycling Collection Team, Team Leaders and Refuse/Recycling Officers did their best to provide the best possible service for customers.

In this instance, we have learnt the importance of leaving the bins/boxes tidily and at the right spot following collections.

I telephoned the customer today and received confirmation that things had improved since her complaint was submitted.

1.3 Transportation Service - Transporting Children with Disabilities to School

1.3.1 Nature of the Complaint

A customer complained about safety standards and lack of service from a taxi company contracted to transport his child to school.

- Taxi failed to turn up to collect the child on more than one occasion and no one had contacted the parent to explain the situation, neither from the company nor from the Council
- Because of the child's condition, such situations are unfortunately highly upsetting for him/her

1.3.2 Service's Response/Service Improvement

The Service has investigated to find out the cause. Had sent the customer a letter stating that a new company would be taking over the school transportation contract.

1.3.3 Lessons Learnt

Service's Comments:

Certainly there are lessons to be learnt from the complaint. Greater communication is needed between everyone involved with the contract.

We intend looking carefully at the process of commissioning transportation for pupils with ALN, in the hope of making every possible change that will lead to a service that better meets the needs of ALN pupils who will require transportation in future. The Transportation staff, and the Education Department staff are currently working on this. The intention is for drivers/passenger assistants to receive training about the condition of the pupils being transported. They do not currently receive any training. It is also hoped to produce a small booklet with guidance for workers and parents listing what to do when such a situation arises.

1.4. Leisure Service

1.4.1. Nature of the Complaint

Complaints were received from two customers who wished to draw the Leisure service's attention to a dangerous situation at a swimming pool. Both customers noted that the pool was busy on the day in question, a great many children and older people swimming across each other.

1.4.2 Service's Response/Service Improvement

The Service investigated the case and saw that all appropriate steps had been taken in line with NOP standards (Normal Operating Procedures). Unfortunately, the CCTV camera was not working at the time so there is no evidence of the situation on film.

1.4.3 Lessons Learnt

Service's Comments

The Service has agreed to trial the use of lanes for such occurrences from now on, in the hope that this will make such a situation safer for everyone in the pool.

1.5. Maritime Service

1.5.1. Nature of the Complaint

Complaint about a member of the Maritime staff.

1.5.2 Service's Response/Service Improvement

After the Service Manager investigated the matter, an apology and explanation was sent to the customer about the situation, thanking him/her for drawing the complaint to the attention of the service.

1.5.3 Lessons Learnt

Service's Comments

The manager discussed the matter with the officer in question to prevent a similar situation from arising again.

1.6. Planning Service

1.6.1. Nature of the Complaint

Customer had complained more than once about a local enforcement matter that was being ignored by the Council.

According to the customer, the same problem had been going on for around 9 years. It was affecting her and other residents in the community. The customer felt that the service was not taking her complaints seriously, as she was not receiving any responses.

1.6.2. Service's Response/Service Improvement

An apology was issued to the customer for not responding previously, and an explanation given as to the cause. The situation was highly complex for the service to resolve in the first instance, specific implications deriving from the case. The Service had to await a response/resolution to another complex situation before this situation could be resolved unfortunately.

1.6.3. Lessons Learnt

Service's Comments

The service has realised the importance of keeping regular constant with the customer about such situations. Communicating about any development regarding the situation is crucial at all times. When an officer explains the situation to a customer, it is easier for them to accept any situation. ‘

1.7. Transportation Service

1.7.1. Nature of the Complaint

Complaint had been received about the process of tendering for the school buses contract. The customer had submitted a tender for the contract but had been unsuccessful. The customer did not believe that he had had enough time to prepare the tender etc. Felt the timing meant that he was not given a fair opportunity to submit a tender.

1.7.2. Service's Response/Service Improvement

The Service had arranged a face-to-face conversation with the customer at once to explain the procedure. Had also asked the Internal Audit Service to look into the tendering process. Internal Audit confirmed that everything had been done correctly. [3]

1.7.3. Lessons Learnt

Service's Comments

It is likely that the lesson that learnt from dealing with Mr X is the importance of including bus companies similar to his early on in our discussions.

We often depend on small bus companies such as Mr X's to assist us in emergencies. It is counter-productive, therefore, to put distance between us and similar companies.

1.8. Revenue Service

1.8.1. Nature of the Complaint

Customer had complained about the lack of response/resolution from the Revenue Service. He had contacted them several times already about the status of his property's bill. The Service claimed that it was classed as a second home but that the customer claimed it had been let as holiday accommodation for years. The matter was resolved for a period of about three months then the process recommenced.

1.8.2. Service's Response/Service Improvement

The Manager explained the situation to the customer but he was not happy with the initial explanation.

The customer paid the bill but noted that he had lost faith in the Council Tax Unit. The complaint was sent back to the service for further attention by the SIO.

1.8.3 Lessons Learnt

Service's Comments

- The main improvement offered to Mr and Mrs Y was to get in touch with individuals within the Department to avoid a three to four week delay over spring and summer. Mr and Mrs Y did not take this opportunity. The next solution was to reduce the delay caused by the introduction of the premium on second homes and long term empty properties.
- The flow of enquiries into the Department was looked at, as was the nature of the complaints received. Briefly, the main changes were:
- Buying a 'call centre' telephone system with a message that the call was in a queue rather than the phone call being missed.
- Moving an experienced member of the telephone calls response team to 'sit' on the e-mails daily and deal with straightforward enquiries there and then, and refer complaints / complex enquiries to the attention of individuals.
- Ensure that letter / e-mail enquiries are processed at once into the electronic 'work flow'.

1.9 YGC

1.9.1. Nature of the complaint

Complaint received by a customer about the fact that his drinking water was being polluted as the land further up the road from his home was not being drained. He claimed the Council should have supported him with the matter. The customer felt that YGC was at fault for the lack of communication about the problem, felt that they should have done more to help him with the situation. Part of the case also involved Public Protection. They went to test the water etc. in line with requirements. The customer had noted that he did not intend taking the matter regarding Public Protection forward, and therefore did not expect a response to his complaint from them.

1.9.2. Service's Response/Service Improvement

The Consultancy Service investigated the matter but was unfortunately unable to be of much assistance because of statutory responsibilities.

1.9.3. Lessons Learnt

Service's Comments

Having reviewed the response to Mr Z's situation and the advice offered after the incident, we realise why Mr Z feels frustrated with the situation. Unfortunately, because of our statutory responsibilities, it was not possible to deal with the situation any differently. In order to gain clarity on the responsibilities for this type of problem we intend to prepare a short booklet explaining to victims of flooding or pollution incidents our exact responsibilities and our ability to assist. Contact details for other bodies or departments (Natural Resources Wales or Public Protection for example) that could help in such situations as these would also be included. This booklet will be shared with victims, or anyone concerned about flood risk, and the hope is that it will be of practical assistance and will help manage expectations.

1.10. Planning Service

1.10.1. Nature of the Complaint

This was a complaint involving equality. A customer had noted his disappointment that the relevant option was not available on an on-line form, no Mr & Mr option available.

1.10.2. Service's Response/Service Improvement

The Service responded and thanked the customer for bringing the matter to its attention. An apology was offered and an acknowledgement that this was a shortcoming on the form. The option had since been added following discussions with the Equality Officer.

1.10.3 Lessons Learnt

Service's Comments

The Service realised the need to update such documentation with the relevant options. Also, an opportunity for the Equality Officer to extend this across the Council, perhaps in case other documentation needed to be updated.

1.11. Revenue Service

1.11.1. Nature of the Complaint

A customer unhappy that she was given a tax bill for a property following the death of a family member. She did not accept that the Service needed further evidence from her to confirm that the property was empty and that "Probate" had not yet gone through. Also, disappointed that she received copies of the bills with written notes on them but no letter to explain the situation.

1.11.2. Service's Response/Service Improvement

The Service contacted her to try to further explain the rationale behind needing the evidence from her. These were statutory requirements for them. The service explained that they needed a letter from her solicitor explaining the situation.

1.11.3. Lessons Learnt

Service's Comments

To avoid such a complaint in future, arrangements need to be put in place to prevent correspondence being sent to customers with notes scribbled on them. And, to ensure a letter is sent along with the bills, etc. clearly explaining why evidence is required in specific cases. It is vitally important to show empathy when needed, it is critical if dealing with a complaint in sensitive cases.

1.12. Revenue Service

1.12.1. Nature of the Complaint

Customer complained about a lack of response from the Service and that she had received the incorrect bill. Also, that an officer had answered her call and as she spoke Welsh the officer asked her whether she wanted to speak to someone in Welsh? Then, when transferred to another Welsh-speaking officer, she was told that she would have to follow the official complaints procedure if she wanted to make a complaint. When she asked him why he was unable to respond to her complaint, she was told that it was not his place to pass on complaints, that he was not permitted to do that.

1.12.2. Service's Response/Service Improvement

The matter was investigated and the officers in question were identified. The first officer was not confident enough to communicate in Welsh with the customer but is an enthusiastic learner who had transferred to the service from another service. An apology was issued about this shortcoming and also about the second officer's response. There is a procedure within the Service to deal with complaints as soon as possible, not to refer people to follow the complaints procedure.

In relation to the bill sent out, an explanation was given as to why this had happened - it was because the customer had stopped her Direct Debit etc. As soon as the customer provided the details and correct evidence, the matter was resolved.

1.12.3. Lessons Learnt

Service's Comments

Not a substantial complaint. None to note.

1.13. Housing Service

1.13.1. Nature of the Complaint

A customer had sent in a complaint about the lack of response from the service to his request for information about grants to renovate an empty property.

1.13.2 Service's Response/Service Improvement

The Service sent him a response and offered an apology for the lack of response previously. Explained the process about which he had enquired.

1.13.3. Lessons Learnt

Service's Comments

We believe that there are two lessons here for us to consider.

Need to ensure that guidelines are entirely clear and outline situations where individuals are not able to/do not qualify. Although we believe the information was included, the complainant had interpreted this differently.

Need to consider the way we communicate or confirm a situation. It would have helped to note that he did not qualify rather than not responding.

1.14. Parking Service

1.14.1. Nature of the Complaint

Customer complained about the situation of cars double parking near her home. This created problems for her as she tried to turn into the street where she lives. She noted that she had complained about this before but had not, unfortunately, received much response.

1.14.2. Service's Response/Service Improvement

An officer from the Parking Team arranged to visit the site to discuss the problem with the customer. Also to see whether anything could be done to improve the situation and make it safer for her and her neighbours.

1.14.3. Lessons Learnt

Service's Comments

The Service noted how important and valuable it was to go out to the site to see the customer rather than trying to interpret the situation over the phone or via e-mail. This gives the customer the genuine impression that you want to help them.

1.15. YGC

1.15.1. Nature of the Complaint

Customer had complained about poor communication by the Gwynedd Consultancy and Assembly officers about road works near her home. Felt that she was not being given enough information and that she would be confined to her house whilst work was going on.

1.15.2. Service's Response/Service Improvement

The Service had contacted the customer directly to ask about the basis for her concerns. They had already held meetings locally, had distributed letters from door to door, and communicated regularly with customers who would be affected by the situation. They telephoned, texted and called at their homes to discuss. The Service had already arranged work to create passing places on other roads from the customer's home over the works period. Had also negotiated with the relevant farmer to create a parking place for the customer in his field. The owners of three other properties affected seemed entirely happy with the situation.

1.15.3. Lessons Learnt

Service's Comments

Although YGC follows the statutory process in all cases like this one, we also carry out a 'Letter Drop' for nearby residents. Some respond asking for more information or to note concerns, this happened with some in this case. However, we must not take for granted that everything is going smoothly if a response from residents is not forthcoming. In future, we must endeavour to contact those who have not responded.

1.16. Transportation Service

1.16.1. Nature of the Complaint

Customer unhappy that she was not receiving regular updates from the Service about what was happening with painting yellow lines to restrict parking. The customer had already complained about this some months earlier.

1.16.2. Service's Response/Service Improvement

The Service apologised for the lack of communication with the customer about the situation, and had sent her an update and had promised to improve communication from now on.

1.16.3. Lessons Learnt

Service's Comments

The service has realised the importance of keeping regular and timely contact with customers in order to keep them in the picture.

*** The same person complained again in April 2019 about the same problem, which is lack of communication.

1.17. Corporate Support

1.17.1. Nature of the Complaint

Had received a complaint about a lack of response to a Freedom of Information request. The Customer contacted the Service on several occasions and had been forced to turn to the complaints procedure because of a lack of response from the Service.

1.17.2. Service's Response/Service Improvement

An apology was offered and an explanation to the customer as to why there had been a delay in responding. An explanation was given to the customer of the way the Freedom of Information system worked etc.

1.17.3. Lessons Learnt

Service's Comments

An internal meeting was held between the Freedom of Information Team and the SIO, and then with the Senior Manager and Head of Service. A lack of clarity regarding the complaints procedure was identified, and as a result the Service decided to remap their existing process to see where improvements could be made. The officers dealing with the requests had good and fair ideas on how to try to improve things.

1.18. Property Service

1.18.1. Nature of the Complaint

Customer got in touch to state his disappointment that he felt that the Property Service had misled him with regards to the purchase of a parcel of land the Council was selling.

The customer's complaint specifically referred to the lack of response from the Property Service and the fact that it refused to pay compensation for the financial loss following the purchase/enquiries.

1.18.2. Service's Response/Service Improvement

After receiving the formal complaint, the Senior Manager within the Service has considered the situation and has apologised to the customer about the matter. He has also arranged to pay compensation for a proportion of the financial loss.

1.18.3. Lessons Learnt

Service's Comments

What we have learnt is that we need to be explicitly clear when referring prospective buyers to the Planning Service. It was suggested to the buyer that he would need planning permission before we could sell the land in question. The prospective buyer went on directly to submit an application and paid an application fee of over £1000. Had we noted that he should have made enquiries or that he should have followed the similar "pre-app" process, he would have discovered that he would not have been given permission, without paying the fee. We have since amended our internal arrangements.

1.19. Waste and Recycling Service s

1.19.1 Nature of the Complaint

The customer had had to complain once more, the third or fourth time his recycling boxes had been left in disarray across his entrance following collection. Not only that but some of the content was regularly dropped and left on the floor near the boxes. The customer had now had enough of the situation and, unfortunately, had considered not recycling because of it. He was also complaining on Facebook about the standard of the Service received by the Council.

1.19.2. Service's Response/Service Improvement

The Recycling Officer noted that the customer had been in touch through the FFOS system also to complain and that he had contacted the customer to discuss the matter. The Officer noted that he had been monitoring the situation since the last complaint in December. He extended an apology to the customer again on behalf of the Service.

1.19.3. Lessons Learnt

Service's Comments

The Recycling Officer would talk to the Senior Team Leader and ask the workers to take care when emptying the cart and to ensure they return them to the collection point after collection.

SIO had asked the customer when writing the report to see whether things had improved, his response was that he still had a good week and a bad week, he added: "I will share that last Monday was very tidy!" (week of 15 April 2019).

SIO suggested that the customer keeps a record for the next month. It would then be easier to target the workers that create the problem to try to find a permanent resolution to the matter.

1.20. Waste and Recycling Service

1.20.1. Nature of the Complaint

Complaint had come in from a customer about the untidiness around the bins on the street where she lives. Equipment was broken and some residents did not seem to recycle at all. People were also putting things in other residents' bins, as they did not have their own containers. Items that should be recycled were being put in the refuse bins. She claimed that the situation had been going on for at least three years. Every time she contacted the Service she said she would get a negative attitude and they claimed that the mess was the residents' fault.

1.20.2. Service's Response/Service Improvement

The Service had gone to investigate the condition of the site and had seen that a problem existed. Had arranged to clear the site but had also arranged for recycling officers to visit the residents of the street on the next refuse collection day to discuss recycling and to remove refuse. Had distributed a supply of the necessary equipment to residents. It appeared as though some residents were leaving their bins out on the street at all times and this could partly account for the problem.

Unfortunately, the customer came back after contact with the SIO within about three weeks to complain that the odd property still had not received containers and were still not recycling.

An officer from the Street Cleaning Team responded by visiting the street immediately. Saw that there remained a problem. The Officer would endeavour to find out whose bins were out and to arrange a further conversation with them or if they were not at home to arrange to send written correspondence.

1.20.3. Lessons learnt

Service's Comments

The Service faces many obstacles to improve the situation. The Street Cleaning Team did not have s.46 powers to deal with the case; therefore, the only actions possible was to discuss with the customer or send a letter about the situation.

The Refuse and Recycling Team felt frustrated as they had gone to visit the site on several occasions to try to educate the residents. It was noted that the customer who had complained was one of the people who left their bins out all week. The likely reason being that there is no rear access for the bins other than through her house. The Team suggested arranging for the residents who do this to get Hessian sacks to keep at the rear of their houses rather than a bin. Hopefully, this would help the situation. The fact that the bins are out attract seagulls etc. and this then exacerbates the situation.

It is clear that the residents' cooperation is needed to try to improve the situation.

1.21. Education Service

1.21.1. Nature of the Complaint

A customer complained about a letter received from the Education Department about the school dinner payment arrangements. She felt that the tone of the letter was disrespectful and threatening. She personally did not want to pay on-line. This did not reflect the Council's vision and Ffordd Gwynedd, she said. She felt that there was a better way to communicate with parents.

1.21.2. Service's Response/Service Improvement

The Education Service response noted that the letter was to advise/remind parents that dinner money had to be paid regularly and drew attention to the Schoolgateway as a straightforward and convenient way of doing this.

The Schoolgateway system was explained to the customer, with assurance that no bank details would be recorded. It was also suggested to the customer that she could set up a Direct Bank Transfer on the system should she wish. The Schoolgateway instructions were sent to the customer for information.

The Service apologised for the tone of the letter, and reiterated its purpose was to convey information.

1.21.3. Lessons learnt

Service's Comments

Two complaints had been received since sending the letter to parents explaining the new expectations for paying for school dinners at the beginning of January. Both complaints noted that the wording of our letter could be improved in conveying the message. We were aware that describing the developments in the school dinner payment system succinctly would be difficult. Furthermore the transition to a cashless system would occur at a different rate for some parents and schools. It is likely that the letter was not perfectly worded.

Letters were issued about school dinner debts in the press, and the complainant drew attention to the fact that she had never been in arrears to the school. To be fair, no one had said that she had.

The flip side of that, however, was that a great many parents had been in touch (following the invitation in the letter) to use the on-line payment system and enquire about their child's right to a free school meal. This was a very positive outcome to the letter sent to parents, and in my opinion outweighed both complaints received.

Section 2

Successes Wall – Council at its Best Comments

Mrs G from Anglesey commented - Dave Buckley, Excellent Service, support and help provided by one of your staff members. He was so friendly, helpful and he took the time to ensure I would be safe on the road. What fantastic qualities to have in a staff member. Thank you so much for your time and help Dave very much appreciated. (Gwastraff)

Hoffai **Mrs R o Glynnog** Ddiolch yn fawr iawn i Meinir a Kayleigh am gymryd ei chwyn o ddifri ac am ddelio efo'r mater yn gwrtais a phroffesiynol iawn. (Cefnogaeth Gorfforaethol)

I forgot to put my green bin out today and the collectors took the trouble to look in the bin and emptied it. Excellent service. Made me feel a valued citizen. Compliments to collectors concerned. Dyna oedd sylw **Mr E o Lanfachreth**. (Gwastraff)

Nes i sylw am goeden mewn cyflwr peryg, a gafodd o'i ddelio hefo o fewn 24 awr. Mae hynna'n rhoi hyder i mi yn staff y Cyngor, a ddaru o stopio i mi i boeni bysa rhywun yn cael ei frifo meddai **Mr E o ardal Dolgellau** (Priffyrdd Dolgellau)

Hoffwn i ddiolch o galon i'r dynion sydd yn gweithio yn safle ailgylchu Pwllheli. Bob amser yn barod i helpu, clên a digon o amynedd. Tri pheth sydd yn brin iawn mewn llawer maes heddiw. Maent yn llawn haeddu medal aur. Diolch yn fawr iddynt. Dyna oedd sylw **Mrs J o Bwllheli**. (Ail Gylchu Pwllheli)

I had a bulky waste collection to remove, items left by the previous owners of the property. I could not have asked for a more courteous, helpful, efficient, understanding and friendly team. From the lady who handled my telephone enquiry to the men who picked up the collection. The people here understand the needs of residents. It's easy to complain when things go wrong, but I really feel that good service should be recognised. Thank you from **Mr J of Dyffryn Ardudwy**. (Cefnogaeth Gorfforaethol/Gwastraff)

Canmoliaeth ddiennw Mae pawb yma mor gymwynasgar a chyfeillgar. Dwi'n trafieilio 'chydig yn bellach i ddefnyddio'r ganolfan yma oherwydd y staff. Mae genod y llyfrgell yn mynd allan o'u ffordd i ffeindio llyfrau maent yn feddwl y gwnaf eu mwynhau. Maent hefyd yn awyddus cael adborth am y llyfrau, dwi'n hoffi hynny. Mae di neud mi ddarllen mwy. Mae pobl mor barod i gwyno, ond mae angen canmol hefyd lle mae cyfle i wneud hynny. (Llyfrgelloedd/Hamdden Glaslyn)

Comments from Mr P from Groeslon Galw Gwynedd staff should be congratulated on their total professionalism and sense of commitment to service when dealing with calls from members of the public. I would also personally like to thank Meinir, Service Improvement Officer, for showing total commitment to her work. These staff members are perfect examples of why anyone would follow a career in Public Service and their attitude and work ethic too, should be an example for all Council staff to follow. (Cefnogaeth Gorfforaethol)

Repairs to potholes in Pen y Bryn Road Bethesda and Short Street, Gerlan beautifully done. As a result of the repairs my false choppers no longer rattle like castanets in a Benidorm nightclub. Thank you very much said **Mr K from Bethesda** (Priffyrdd Arfon)

Gwasanaeth ardderchog gan y Cyngor. Derbyn y pass y diwrnod ar ôl cyflwyno'r cais i Siop Gwynedd Caernarfon. Staff Siop Gwynedd hefyd yn barod iawn i helpu. Wedi cael gwasanaeth ardderchog a cyflym eisoes yn ddiweddar gyda bathodyn glas hefyd. Da iawn pawb meddai **Mrs J o Bontnewydd**. (Cefnogaeth Gorfforaethol - Siop Gwynedd Caernarfon)

Just wanted to express my sincere thanks for an outstanding efficient response. To have the matter rectified within 24 hours was awesome! The crew who attended (Gerwyn, Ieu, Cellan) were brilliant. Thank you once again said **Mr K Dolgellau area** (Priffyrdd Dolgellau)