

Ombudsman Ombwdsmon

PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES
OMBWDSMON GWASANAETHAU CYHOEDDUS CYMRU

Delivering Justice

The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS

2019/20

Executive Summary



Message from the Ombudsman

This document was prepared during the Covid-19 global pandemic which has put unprecedented pressures on Welsh public services, particularly health and social care. I am therefore glad to report this year some trends that could indicate improvement in practice by bodies in my jurisdiction.



We saw this year fewer new complaints; a smaller proportion of cases where we found maladministration or service failure; and fewer most serious cases, requiring us to issue a public interest report or refer an alleged breach of the Code of Conduct to the Adjudication Panel for Wales or Local Authority Standards Committees.

Amongst the main highlights of the year, in 2019 the National Assembly for Wales passed our new Act. We are now the first ombudsman office in the UK to have full and operational powers to drive systemic improvement of public services through investigations on own initiative and the Complaints Standards role. We took this year major steps to implement these new powers, alongside our more traditional work to promote improvement.

None of this work would have happened without my dedicated staff. My thanks to them for the excellent work that they have done in delivering justice in Wales.

Nick Bennett

Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

About us

We have three main roles:

- handling complaints about public service providers
- considering complaints about breaches of the Code of Conduct by elected members
- driving systemic improvement of public services.

We are independent of all government bodies and the service we provide is free of charge.

We are based in Pencoed, South Wales. We also have a small office in North Wales.

Contact us

1 Ffordd yr Hen Gae, Pencoed, CF35 5LJ

0300 790 0203

ask@ombudsman.wales

<https://www.ombudsman.wales/>



We have **73** staff





We deliver for those who have suffered injustice

	2019/20		2018/19
New enquiries and complaints	7200		7116

New complaints about public bodies	2242		2207
---	-------------	--	-------------

About

1.6%

more new complaints about public bodies. This could indicate a drop in their performance - but could also be attributed to increasing awareness of our service.

Health	41%		41%
Housing	15%		12%
Complaint handling	9%		11%
Social services	8%		9%
Planning and building control	7%		9%
Other	20%	...	18%

Despite the same level of complaints about health overall,

3%

fall in new complaints about Health Boards, suggesting that our work with these bodies may be helping to support improvement.

New Code of Conduct complaints	231		282
---------------------------------------	------------	--	------------

About

18%

fewer allegations of breaches of the Code of Conduct, due to a significant and welcome drop in frivolous complaints made against members of Town and Community Councils.

Promotion of equality and respect	49%		51%
Disclosure and registration of interests	17%		17%
Accountability and openness	11%		7%
Integrity	10%		13%
Duty to uphold the law	7%		9%
Selflessness and stewardship	3%		1%
Objectivity and propriety	2%		2%

We had to **intervene in** (uphold, settle or resolve early) a smaller proportion of complaints about public bodies: **20%** compared to **24%** last year.

We also **referred** a smaller proportion of Code of Conduct complaints to a Standards Committee or the Adjudication Panel for Wales: **2%** compared to **3%** last year.

1222

recommendations issued to public bodies.

Almost £80k

of financial redress recommended.

0

We did not need to issue any special reports.

20%

of our recommendations highlighted retraining or process reviews. This can lead to significant improvement in public services.

An example of impact of our recommendations

We investigated this year a complaint brought to us by the family of someone who had sadly died. The family was concerned about the care given by the Health Board in question, including intravenous (IV) fluid management. We recommended that the Health Board review its procedures. As a result, the Health Board recognised it did not have an up to date IV fluid management policy. The Health Board also appointed a clinical lead to co-ordinate new guidelines and, in December 2019, published new guidance on this issue.

We innovate and drive improvement across the public sector



Our new legislation passed in 2019 gave us new powers to undertake investigations on 'own initiative' as well as to establish a Complaints Standards role.



We launched a consultation on our proposal to focus our first own initiative investigation on homelessness.



We finalised our Complaint Handling Principles, Model Complaints Handling Policy and accompanying guidance.



We engaged extensively about our new powers with stakeholders across Wales.



We issued criteria and a process for undertaking own initiative investigations.




We started to gather data from Local Authorities on their complaint handling, finding much divergence in practices across Wales.


We also continued to share our findings through public interest reports, casebooks, thematic reports and annual letters to the bodies in our jurisdiction.


We issued:

4 public interest reports

About


Health  2

Planning  1

Student loans  1

1 thematic report

[Justice Mislaid: Lost Records and Lost Opportunities](#) 

We published our first [Equality and Human Rights Casebook](#) 

“The new Human Rights Casebook by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales is an excellent resource for ensuring that public bodies remain committed to their equality and human rights obligations.”

Equality and Human Rights Commission



We embrace learning and welcome feedback

227 review cases were closed.

11% of these reviews identified that we could do more, often where additional evidence was provided by the complainant.

32 complaints about us were closed.

22% of these were upheld or partially upheld.

57% of all complainants questioned were satisfied with our customer service...

...rising to **98%** amongst those satisfied with the outcome of their complaint.



We strive to ensure and promote accessibility, equality and diversity

91% of our customers questioned found it easy to contact us.

48% of respondents to a national survey knew about us.

2% of complaints were received orally. We are planning more outreach around this power in 2020/21.

87% of respondents to our staff survey felt that PSOW is committed to creating a diverse, equal and inclusive workplace.



We signed up as a Disability Confident Committed Employer.



We achieved the silver FairPlay Employer level for gender equality.



We care for and invest in our staff

99%

of respondents to our staff survey were proud to work for PSOW.

93%

of staff completed 28 or more hours of continuing professional development.

We saw the average percentage of working days lost through staff sickness increase to

3.4%



... but we launched our new Wellbeing Strategy and a number of actions to support staff wellbeing.



We are accountable and transparent about our performance and use of resources

Our budget

£4,954k

92%

of our budgeted funding for new powers (£231k) was actually spent on implementation.

Our unit cost per case

£669

Over the last 7 years we have seen

a **34%** rise in workload

a **14%** fall, in real terms, in unit cost per case.



We attended two scrutiny sessions with the National Assembly for Wales.



We reduced our energy usage by 2%.



We maintained close links with colleagues in the UK, Europe and around the world.



We reduced our waste by 13.2%.

We avoided

41%

more commuting mileage per day.