



Ask for: Communications

 01656 641150

Date: August 2022

 communications@ombudsman.wales

Cllr. Huw David
Bridgend County Borough Council
By Email only: cllr.huw.david@bridgend.gov.uk

Annual Letter 2021/22

Dear Councillor David

I am pleased to provide you with the Annual letter (2021/22) for Bridgend 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 is my first annual letter since taking up the role of Public Services Ombudsman in April 2022, and I appreciate that the effects of the pandemic are still being felt by all public bodies in Wales. Our office has not been immune from this, with records numbers of cases being referred to us over the last two years. The strong working relationships between my Office and local authorities continues to deliver improvements in how we are dealing with complaints and ensuring that, when things go wrong, we are learning from that and building stronger public services.

Complaints relating to Maladministration & Service Failure

Last year the number of complaints referred to us regarding Local Authorities increased by 47% (compared to 20/21 figures) and are now well above pre-pandemic levels. It is likely that complaints to my office, and public services in general, were suppressed during the pandemic, and we are now starting to see the expected 'rebound' effect.

During this period, we intervened in (upheld, settled or resolved at an early stage) a similar proportion of complaints about public bodies, 18%, when compared with recent years. Intervention rates (where we have investigated complaints) for Local Authorities also remained at a similar level – 14% compared to 13% in recent years.

Complaints relating to the Code of Conduct for Councillors

We also received a high number of Code of Conduct complaints last year, relating to both Principal Councils and Town and Community Councils. A record number (20) were referred to either the Adjudication Panel for Wales or local standards committees, due to evidence of a breach of the Code.

Supporting improvement of public services

In addition to managing record levels of complaints, we also continued our work using our proactive powers in the Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Act 2019. Specifically undertaking our first Own Initiative Investigation and continuing our work on the Complaints Standards Authority.

October 2021 saw the publication of the first own initiative investigation in Wales: [Homelessness Reviewed](#). The investigation featured three Local Authorities and sought to scrutinise the way Homelessness assessments were conducted. The report made specific recommendations to the investigated authorities, as well as suggestions to all other Local Authorities in Wales and Welsh Government. Some of these recommendations will bring about immediate change – updating factsheets and letter and assessment templates to ensure that key equality and human rights considerations are routinely embedded into processes for example – all the recommendations were designed to bring about tangible change to people using homelessness services in Wales.

The Complaints Standards Authority (CSA) continued its work with public bodies in Wales last year. The model complaints policy has already been adopted by local authorities and health boards in Wales, we have now extended this to an initial tranche of Housing Associations and Natural Resources Wales. The aim being to implement this work across the Welsh public sector.

In addition to this, the CSA published information on complaints handled by local authorities for the [first time](#) – a key achievement for this work. The data for 21/22 showed:

- Over 15,000 complaints were recorded by Local Authorities
- 4.88 for every 1000 residents.
- Nearly half (46%) of those complaints were upheld.
- About 75% were investigated within 20 working days.
- About 8% of all complaints closed ended up being referred to PSOW.

The CSA has now implemented a model complaints policy with nearly 50 public bodies, and delivered 140 training sessions, completely free of charge, during the last financial year. The feedback has been excellent, and the training has been very popular - so I would encourage Bridgend County Borough Council to engage as fully as possible.

Complaints made to the Ombudsman

A summary of the complaints of maladministration/service failure received relating to your Council is attached, along with a summary of the Code of Conduct complaints relating to members of the Council and the Town & Community Councils in your area.

In light of the new duties on political leaders and standards committees to promote and maintain high standards of conduct of their members, we look forward to working with you, your Monitoring Officer and standards committees to share any learning from the complaints we receive and to support your authority's work.

I would also welcome feedback on your Governance & Audit Committee's review of your authority's ability to handle complaints effectively so that we can take this into account in our work and support its work on the handling of complaints.

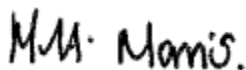
Finally, can I thank you and your officials for the positive way that local authorities have engaged with my Office to enable us to deliver these achievements during what has been a challenging year for everyone. I very much look forward to continuing this work and collaboration to ensure we further improve public services across Wales.

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 & Audit Committee to assist members in their scrutiny of the Council's performance and share any feedback from the Cabinet and the Governance & Audit Committee with my office.
- Continue to engage with our Complaints Standards work, accessing training for your staff, fully implementing the model policy, and providing complaints data.
- Inform me of the outcome of the Council's considerations and proposed actions on the above matters by 30 September.

This correspondence is copied to the Chief Executive of your Council and to your Contact Officer. Finally, a copy of all Annual Letters will be published on my website.

Yours sincerely,



Michelle Morris

Public Services Ombudsman

cc. Mark Shephard, Chief Executive, Bridgend County Borough Council.

By Email only: mark.shephard@bridgend.gov.uk

Factsheet

Appendix A - Complaints Received

| Local Authority | Complaints Received | Received per 1000 residents |
|--|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council | 14 | 0.20 |
| Bridgend County Borough Council | 55 | 0.37 |
| Caerphilly County Borough Council | 60 | 0.33 |
| Cardiff Council* | 182 | 0.50 |
| Carmarthenshire County Council | 54 | 0.29 |
| Ceredigion County Council | 52 | 0.72 |
| Conwy County Borough Council | 27 | 0.23 |
| Denbighshire County Council | 34 | 0.36 |
| Flintshire County Council | 99 | 0.63 |
| Gwynedd Council | 39 | 0.31 |
| Isle of Anglesey County Council | 29 | 0.41 |
| Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council | 27 | 0.45 |
| Monmouthshire County Council | 20 | 0.21 |
| Neath Port Talbot Council | 45 | 0.31 |
| Newport City Council | 40 | 0.26 |
| Pembrokeshire County Council | 39 | 0.31 |
| Powys County Council | 55 | 0.42 |
| Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council | 51 | 0.21 |
| Swansea Council | 71 | 0.29 |
| Torfaen County Borough Council | 18 | 0.19 |
| Vale of Glamorgan Council | 61 | 0.46 |
| Wrexham County Borough Council | 71 | 0.52 |
| Total | 1143 | 0.36 |

* inc 17 Rent Smart Wales

Appendix B - Received by Subject

| Bridgend County Borough Council | Complaints Received | % Share |
|--|----------------------------|----------------|
| Adult Social Services | 5 | 9% |
| Benefits Administration | 0 | 0% |
| Children's Social Services | 8 | 15% |
| Community Facilities, Recreation and Leisure | 2 | 4% |
| Complaints Handling | 5 | 9% |
| Covid19 | 2 | 4% |
| Education | 8 | 15% |
| Environment and Environmental Health | 4 | 7% |
| Finance and Taxation | 4 | 7% |
| Housing | 6 | 11% |
| Licensing | 1 | 2% |
| Planning and Building Control | 6 | 11% |
| Roads and Transport | 2 | 4% |
| Various Other | 2 | 4% |
| Total | 55 | |

Appendix C - Complaint Outcomes
 (* denotes intervention)

| County/County Borough Councils | Out of Jurisdiction | Premature | Other cases closed after initial consideration | Early Resolution/ voluntary settlement* | Discontinued | Other Reports- Not Upheld | Other Reports Upheld* | Public Interest Report* | Total |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|-----------|--|---|--------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|-------|
| Bridgend County Borough Council | 9 | 22 | 16 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 54 |
| % Share | 17% | 41% | 30% | 9% | 0% | 0% | 2% | 2% | |

Appendix D - Cases with PSOW Intervention

| | No. of interventions | No. of closures | % of interventions |
|--|----------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council | 0 | 13 | 0% |
| Bridgend County Borough Council | 7 | 54 | 13% |
| Caerphilly County Borough Council | 7 | 58 | 12% |
| Cardiff Council | 45 | 159 | 28% |
| Cardiff Council - Rent Smart Wales | 1 | 16 | 6% |
| Carmarthenshire County Council | 7 | 49 | 14% |
| Ceredigion County Council | 13 | 46 | 28% |
| Conwy County Borough Council | 2 | 24 | 8% |
| Denbighshire County Council | 4 | 33 | 12% |
| Flintshire County Council | 15 | 94 | 16% |
| Gwynedd Council | 6 | 41 | 15% |
| Isle of Anglesey County Council | 3 | 28 | 11% |
| Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council | 2 | 26 | 8% |
| Monmouthshire County Council | 2 | 21 | 10% |
| Neath Port Talbot Council | 5 | 45 | 11% |
| Newport City Council | 4 | 36 | 11% |
| Pembrokeshire County Council | 2 | 40 | 5% |
| Powys County Council | 7 | 55 | 13% |
| Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council | 3 | 45 | 7% |
| Swansea Council | 10 | 76 | 13% |
| Torfaen County Borough Council | 2 | 20 | 10% |
| Vale of Glamorgan Council | 9 | 62 | 15% |
| Wrexham County Borough Council | 4 | 67 | 6% |
| Total | 160 | 1108 | 14% |

Appendix E - Code of Conduct Complaints

| County/County Borough Councils | Discontinued | No evidence of breach | No action necessary | Refer to Adjudication Panel | Refer to Standards Committee | Withdrawn | Total |
|---------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------|-------|
| Bridgend County Borough Council | 1 | 7 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 9 |

Appendix F - Town/Community Council Code of Complaints

| Town/Community Council | Discontinued | No evidence of breach | No action necessary | Refer to Adjudication Panel | Refer to Standards Committee | Withdrawn | Total |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------|-------|
| Bridgend Town Council | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Coity Higher Community Council | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Laleston Community Council | - | - | - | - | - | - | 0 |
| Llangynwyd Middle Community Council | - | - | - | - | - | - | 0 |
| Maesteg Town Council | 5 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 |
| Newcastle Higher Community Council | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Pencoed Town Council | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Porthcawl Town Council | 0 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 7 |

Information Sheet

Appendix A shows the number of complaints received by PSOW for all Local Authorities in 2021/2022. These complaints are contextualised by the number of people each health board reportedly serves.

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 2021/2022. 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 2021/2022. 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 2021/2022. 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. This table shows both the volume, and the proportion that each outcome represents for each Town or Community Council.