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Biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty (section 6 duty) Action Report 2022/23

December 2023



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Biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty (section 6 duty) Action Report 2022/23

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Foreword

Protecting the environment remains a priority for us. Where possible, we work to reduce the impact of the office on the environment and seek to operate in a sustainable and responsible manner.

This report presents our performance and actions during 2022/23 under biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty, in compliance with the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

It also outlines our progress in the areas for improvement that we identified in 2021/22:

- reviewing the tools available to comprehensively evaluate our carbon footprint and undertake any training required to use them;
- considering the sustainability impact of reducing / adjusting our office space; and
- encouraging staff to consider ways they can reduce their environmental impact.

During the year, we have also reduced our office space. We continue to operate a hybrid model of working, with many of our staff continuing to work from home and attending the office depending on the need. This is reflected in our sustainability performance this year.

As in the previous year, an important factor shaping our work during 2022/23 has been the very significant increase in our casework. That increase placed our staff under considerable pressure. Given this, we know that we need to be realistic when setting our sustainability goals, focusing on a limited number of actions which can have most impact.

Michelle Morris

**Public Services
Ombudsman for Wales**

December 2023



Biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty

The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 introduced an enhanced biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty (the section 6 duty) for public authorities in the exercise of functions in relation to Wales.

The section 6 duty requires that public authorities 'seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity so far as consistent with the proper exercise of their functions and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems'. To comply with the duty public authorities should embed the consideration of biodiversity and ecosystems into their early thinking and business planning, including any policies, plans, programmes and projects, as well as their day-to-day activities.

PSOW falls within the definition of public authority under the terms of the Act and so we are required to publish a report on how we have complied with the section 6 duty.

Although PSOW is not subject to the full duties of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, we fully support the vision of the Act to create a more sustainable Wales.



About us

We have three main roles.



We investigate complaints about public services.



We consider complaints about councillors breaching the Code of Conduct.



We drive systemic improvement of public services and standards of conduct in local government in Wales.

We are independent of all government bodies and our service is free of charge.

Our building

We continue to occupy one office in Pencoed, near Bridgend. We originally took up the lease for the ground floor in 2005 and have, since then, expanded to occupy part of the first and second floors to accommodate over 70 staff and visitors in a largely open plan office space.

Building	Constructed	No. of Floors	Total Usable Floor Area (ft ²)	Heating Type
1 Ffordd yr Hen Gae	2004	3	16,460	Air Handling Units

Electricity is the only energy supply used and this provides lighting and heating/cooling as well as powering normal office equipment.

From January 2023, we have reduced the office space that we are using, in line with our new model of hybrid and agile working. (We are seeking to reflect this reduction in revised lease arrangements, but the table above shows the full floor area currently included in our lease.) While our current lease runs until 2025, we are actively marketing the additional space in the interim to achieve savings as soon as possible.



Action report



We recycled 95% of our waste.



We used only slightly more electricity than last year.



We reduced the office space that we use.



We avoided 134 kgs of CO₂ in emissions.

1. Engage and support participation and understanding to embed biodiversity throughout decision making at all levels.

Attention to sustainability is integrated into our key policies and strategic plans. For example:

- At the beginning of April 2023 we launched our new Strategic Plan 2023-2026. Under our new Strategic Aim 4, 'Ensuring that we are a healthy, efficient and accountable organisation', we have committed to 'Play our part in protecting the environment, by further reducing our carbon footprint.'
- For the duration of the Plan, we have identified Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in relation to waste and electricity.
- In our Business Plan for 2023/24, we commit to
 - > Maintain energy use and waste despite increased office presence (achieved when our waste and energy does not increase compared to the previous period)
 - > Improve how we measure our carbon footprint, and establish meaningful baseline figures for Years 2 and 3 (achieved when the measurement process in place).
- Our Procurement Policy requires that 'all procurement should consider sustainability issues'.



In 2021/22, we committed to continue to encourage staff to consider ways they can reduce their environmental impact.

During the year, we used our internal communications channels to share with staff some relevant guidance. In January 2023, we shared 4 posts with 'Biodiversity and Sustainability Resources' which provide information on how we can live in a way that respects nature.

In September 2023, we raised awareness of Second Hand September - a campaign by Oxfam that promotes donating, reusing, rewearing and restyling your clothes.

One of our teams dedicated time to litter picking together in our neighbourhood and collected 1 bag of rubbish and 1 bag of recycling.

We have also increased the number of people who use of the Electric Vehicle (EV) charger available at the office. Having this facility available will have contributed to staff decisions to purchase an EV car instead of a standard fuel car. Also, since other tenants saw that we had an EV charger installed, they have installed another charger.

We also committed to reviewing the tools available to comprehensively evaluate our carbon footprint and undertake any training required to use them.

This work is in progress. We have started to use the UK Government GHG (Green House Gases) conversion factors to help us report on emissions. Part of our emissions are produced by staff working from home and commuting to and from the office. We are continuing to work on ways of accurately recording where staff are working from and how often they travel to/from the office.



2. Tackle key pressures on species and habitats

Our office building is leased, which limits our ability to make changes to the energy efficiency of the building. Because of that, our work to improve sustainability and reduce any adverse impact on the environment has focused on reducing waste, energy use and emissions. In line with our model of hybrid and agile working, we continued to support staff to work at home but we have also made greater use of our offices. This increased energy use and waste.

Waste produced on site

Over the recent years, we have taken steps to significantly reduce our waste. For example, all our case sub files are now sent to the professional advisors in an electronic format. We use Objective Connect to allow us to send large files securely online.

However, the amount of waste we produced has increased this year. This was due to the downsizing of the office space from January 2023 and staff clearing their desks and cupboards and reducing filing.

We continued to increase the proportion of recycled waste up to 95% (from 94% in 2021/22) and achieve 0% of waste to landfill.

Electricity

Compared to last year, we increased our energy usage only very slightly, reflecting the fact that more staff have been working more regularly from the office.

Staff working at home

We continued to support staff to work effectively at home. Average commuting mileage per day decreased only slightly compared to the previous year.

In 2021/22, we committed to considering the sustainability impact of reducing / adjusting our office space. Overall,

- between December 2022 – September 2023 we have seen a reduction of approximately 31% of electricity usage in the office.
- all the excess furniture from the 1st and 2nd floors has been disposed of by donating to charity or was collected to be reused/ repurposed which has avoided any of it being taken to landfill.
- we have purchased our office plants and now take care of them ourselves. The plants were previously rented and cared for by an outside company who would travel to us once a fortnight, so we are now avoiding the travelling emissions.



- We have retained the same number of plants that we had for the 3 floors which will continue to help absorb CO₂ in the office.
- we expect to see a reduction in waste in the longer term, as we have mostly completed clearing the unused office spaces.

Waste Type	2019/20	2021/22	2022/23
Confidential waste (recycled) (kg)	8,650	7,920	16,320
Mixed recycling (kg)	2,346	712	572
General waste (kg)	16,000	573	804
Total waste	26,996	9,205	17,696
CO ₂ e saved (kg)	-	1,228	2,612

Electricity usage	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Usage (kWh)	72,226	73,754	74,102
Emissions produced (kg CO ₂ e)	-	14,262	14,329

* conversion factors from UK Government GHG conversion factors for company reporting (0.19338 per unit).

Emissions	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Number of staff based in the PSOW office (part time / full time)	72 (20 PT/52 FT)	74 (22 PT/52 FT)	77 (24 PT/53 FT)
Number of staff Working at Home for part of the week	72	74	65
Working at Home days per average week	308	315	301
Average commuting mileage per day saved	2,281	2,706	2,199
Average kgs of CO ₂ in emissions avoided	182,309	176,404	133,944



3. Put in place a framework of governance and support for delivery

Responsibility for PSOW's performance on sustainability lies with the Chief Operating Officer & Director of Improvement and the Head of Corporate Services.

The Head of Corporate Services undertakes internal reviews of PSOW performance on sustainability on an annual basis.

The findings of the process are communicated to PSOW's Management Team, and these serve to inform our strategic planning as well as this annual sustainability report.

Climate change and climate change risk

Our impact on climate change is limited by the nature of the business, and our ability to control some aspects is limited by our occupation of a rented and shared building on a managed business park. That said, it is important that we understand our impact and take steps to minimise adverse impact and to manage the consequences of climate change.

In particular we can:

- consider what we do and how we can have an impact climate change, even where our impact may be small
- minimise and mitigate waste, energy and emissions
- manage risk associated with climate change.

This report includes our consideration of our impact on climate change, as well as biodiversity, ecosystems and sustainability.

We include appropriate climate change risk in our risk register, for consideration by our Management Team and our Audit & Risk Assurance Committee.



Reporting and planning

We continue to monitor and report on performance of sustainability on an annual basis.

In compliance with the requirements under section 6, sub-section (6) of the Environment Act 2016, we identify at the same time any areas for improvement.

Looking forward, these will include:

- Maintaining energy use and waste despite increased office presence
- Improving how we measure our carbon footprint, to set meaningful baseline for Year 2 and 3 of our Strategic Plan
- Encouraging staff to consider ways they can reduce their environmental impact.

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