



**Ombwdsmon
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Ombudsman Wales

Quarterly Newsletter

November 2024 - March 2025

Mae'r neges hwn hefyd ar gael [yn y Gymraeg](#).

A word from the Ombudsman, Michelle Morris

Welcome to the 6th edition of our newsletter.

We have now completed the second year of our [Strategic Plan 2023-26 'A New Chapter'](#). Many actions set out under the Plan have now been delivered and we will continue to work towards our ambitious goals during 2025/26.



We remain focused on rebuilding the reputation of the office, following the social media incident last year which called our impartiality into question. While an independent **review of our investigation of Code of Conduct Complaints** found that our decision making was appropriate, fair and free from political bias, it also made recommendations to improve the current safeguards for ensuring fairness and impartiality.

Over the recent months, our focus has also been on the Finance Committee's **post-legislative review of the Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Act 2019**. The Act requires the Senedd to undertake a post-legislative review as soon as practicable after 21 May 2024 (that is, five years since the 2019 Act received Royal Assent). We have been busy assembling evidence on the impact of our proactive powers to accept complaints other than in writing; undertake investigations on own initiative; and set complaints standards. We have also been invited to speak to the Committee on 30 April.

In the meantime, we again bring you a **quick and easy-to-digest summary of our complaints and improvement work**. We are not including in this edition of the newsletter our year-end complaints statistics, as the full details will be available in our Annual Report & Accounts for 2024/25. However, we provide summaries of our recent public interest reports and our Code of Conduct referrals, as well as details of our two recent thematic reports and our complaints standards work.

It has been a busy year! Despite the challenges, we have a lot to be proud of. We are looking forward to sharing more evidence of our impact in our submission to the Senedd's Finance Committee as well as discussing all areas of our performance in our next Annual Report.

Our Casework – November 2024 to March 2025

Public Interest reports

Between November 2024 and March 2025 we have published **3** public interest reports.

Case reference 202303356 - GP Practice in the area of Aneurin Bevan University Health Board

We found that a cancer patient would have likely survived longer, had an earlier urgent referral been made by the patient's GP Practice. The patient's symptoms should have resulted in an urgent suspected cancer referral in July 2021. However, despite ongoing symptoms and multiple opportunities, the patient was only referred by the Practice for further investigation in May 2022. Find more details [here](#).



Case reference 202306104 - Welsh Ambulance Services University NHS Trust

We found that the Trust did not properly manage two 999 calls about a patient who collapsed at home and later died. This meant a delay of 32 minutes in an ambulance attending the patient. We also found failings in the standard of advice given by the Trust's staff over the phone as well as record keeping by the attending paramedic. We also found failings in how the



Trust handled the original complaint about these failings. Find more details [here](#).

Case reference 202302966, 202307480 - Welsh Ambulance Services University NHS Trust and Swansea Bay University Health Board



We found that the Trust did not correctly consider escalating the ambulance response category when responding to an emergency call about an elderly patient who fell at home. An ambulance arrived at the address around 16 hours after the first of 6 emergency calls made by the family. We also found failings in how the Trust handled the original complaint about these failings.

We did not uphold the complaint against the Health Board about the standard of the patient's care once admitted to the hospital. Find more details [here](#).

Code of Conduct referrals

Since November 2024, we saw decisions on investigation referrals to Standards Committees and to the Adjudication Panel for Wales:

Cllr Baines of the Chirk Town Council (202107304)

We received a complaint that Cllr Baines of Chirk Town Council had breached the Code of Conduct. It was alleged that the Councillor sent messages to an individual on social media threatening to report their spouse and prevent them from obtaining work from the Council.

Our investigation found that the Councillor's explanation for his intention in sending the message was not a plausible one. The messages could reasonably be interpreted as the Councillor suggesting that he would misuse his position as a member to disadvantage the individual's husband.

We referred the report on the investigation to the Wrexham County Borough Council's Standards Committee. The Committee found that Cllr Baines failed to comply with paragraph 7(a) of the Code of Conduct.

The Committee decided that the most appropriate sanction to be applied was a censure and noted that it was the only sanction available to it given the member's resignation from the Council. ([Full case summary](#))

Cllr Phillips of Llansantffraed Community Council (202208582)

We received a complaint that Cllr Phillips of Llansantffraed Community Council had breached the Code of Conduct following a criminal conviction for driving whilst over the legal limit for alcohol. Although the conduct complained about occurred in the Councillors personal capacity, we considered that his conviction, which was serious, and the press coverage that followed, may have brought his office as member into disrepute. We referred the investigation to the Ceredigion County Council's Standards Committee. The Committee found that the Member had failed to comply with paragraph 6(1)(a) of the Code of Conduct. The Committee decided that the most appropriate sanction to be applied was a censure. ([Full case summary](#))

Cllr Steven Bletsoe of Bridgend Town Council (202204885)

We received a complaint that Cllr Steven Bletsoe of Bridgend Town Council had breached the Code of Conduct.

Our investigation suggested that the member

- had failed to declare a personal and prejudicial interest in a Council meeting
- had taken part in a discussion in the Council meeting when he should not have done given his interests; and
- by taking part in the discussion, had tried to influence a decision on the matter discussed to gain an advantage for his wife.

We referred our report on our investigation to the Bridgend County Borough Council's Standards Committee.

The Standards Committee determined that the councillor had breached several paragraphs of the Code of Conduct and decided to suspend him for 6 months. Although the matter was considered on appeal by the Adjudication Panel for Wales who recommended a reduced period of suspension the Standards Committee upheld its original decision. ([Full case summary](#))

Cllr Freya Bletsoe of Bridgend Town Council (202201997)

We received a complaint that Cllr Freya Bletsoe of Bridgend Town Council breached the Code of Conduct. It was alleged that the Councillor had bullied the complainant, an employee of the Council, over a number of years, and had not treated the complainant with courtesy and respect. Following investigation, we considered the Councillor's conduct was suggestive of breaches of the Code and we referred our investigation report to the President of the Adjudication Panel for Wales, for adjudication by a tribunal.

The Tribunal found that the Councillor had failed to comply with a number of the duties in the Code. It found the Councillor had

- failed to treat the complainant with consideration and respect;
- made vexatious, malicious or frivolous complaints about the complainant;
- bullied/harassed the complainant, and
- acted in a way which brought the Council into disrepute.

The Tribunal decided to disqualify the Councillor from being a member of Bridgend Town Council for 21 months. ([Full case summary](#))

One further decision which we referred to a Standards Committee for hearing is currently being considered on appeal by the Adjudication Panel for Wales.

Improvement work

We also have an important role to drive public services improvement. In line with our legislation we issue thematic reports with general recommendations for public bodies drawing on lessons learned from our casework.

‘Living in Disrepair’ Thematic Report

In November, we published a thematic report about housing disrepair and damp and mould complaints.

Between 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2024, general housing complaints formed 17% of our new complaints – the second highest complaint topic after healthcare (36%). Close to 800 of those complaints were complaints about disrepair.

We identified the following themes and learning points:

- Complaint v Service request: Occupiers should not have to raise complaints to see that remedial work is done and, similarly, should not have to repeatedly chase public bodies in order for a complaint to be initiated. Where an occupier has had to do this, we consider that the public body has had a reasonable opportunity to respond to the issues raised.
- Quality of Pre-letting inspections: At the point of letting, landlords are required, by law, to ensure properties are both in repair and fit for habitation. The Report highlights evidence of pre-letting inspections of questionable quality in some of the complaints received by us.
- Occupiers in vulnerable situations: The Report evidences several case examples of occupiers in vulnerable situations who would have waited significantly longer for necessary works to be completed, were it not for the intervention of our office.

- Complaint handling: The Report evidences several case examples of complaint responses seemingly being delayed whilst the body carried out some works in the meantime, perhaps so that the response can reflect well on the body, or the body failing to properly record a complaint.

The Report also draws attention to positive evidence of good practice in relation to seeking professional opinion during a public body's complaint investigation, demonstrating a robust investigation and a desire by the landlord to find the cause of the issue.

We recommended that all public sector/social landlords in Wales:

- undertake a stock survey, to better identify properties that are suffering from, or at risk of, damp and mould;
- undertake a full and proper pre-letting inspection before an occupier moves in and completes all necessary works before the occupancy begins;
- record repeated service requests as complaints when work has not been undertaken;
- engage independent surveyors to inspect properties where complaints of serious disrepair are made.

‘Equality Matters’ thematic report

In January, we published the second Thematic Report this year - ‘Equality Matters’.

Over recent years, we shared information about cases in which equality and human rights implications have been considered in an annual Equality and Human Rights Casebook. This year, we decided to issue instead a Thematic Report, given that some equality and human rights themes continue to appear in casework.

Drawing on a review of the our cases closed between April 2023 and September 2024, our Report sheds light on recurring themes related to the difficulties people have faced in accessing public services in Wales.

Among the key themes and learning points highlighted in the Report is the lack of reasonable adjustments for individuals with specific needs, such as learning disabilities, severe mobility issues, or autism and dyslexia. The Report also notes challenges arising from poor communication with people who have language needs or sensory loss.

Additionally, the Report raises concerns about public bodies failing to align service delivery policies with their legal duties under equality and human rights legislation. However, it also highlights examples of good practice that demonstrate how public services can effectively meet equality and human rights standards.

The Thematic Report makes several recommendations for all public bodies in Wales, focusing on improving inclusion and accessibility across public services.

Complaints standards data

In January, we published the data on complaints handled by local councils in Wales during the first half of 2024/25 financial year.

The data showed that during that period:

- local councils logged nearly 11,000 complaints, an increase on the previous years
- local councils handled more than 75% of complaints within the target time of 20 working days - similar to previous years.
- the main themes of complaints to local councils have been waste and refuse (37%), housing (18%) and social services (12%)
- local councils upheld more than 50% of all complaints, a slight increase on last year.

We also published data on complaints handled by Welsh Health Boards and Trusts during that period. The data showed that

- Welsh Health Boards and Trusts logged just over 9,000 complaints – a slightly lower number compared to the same period last year
- Welsh Health Boards and Trusts closed more than 80% of complaints within the target of 30 working days – an improvement on the same period last year

The proportion of complaints handled by local councils and by Welsh Health Boards and Trusts and then referred to us remained broadly the same as last year.

New features on our website

We are continuing to improve our website to ensure that it is fully accessible and that it includes helpful information for our complainants, organisations in our jurisdiction and the press and general public. We want to take this opportunity to highlight again new or updated features available:

Our findings

To browse or search summaries of complaints we resolved early or investigated, see [Our Findings](#). This feature has been upgraded to allow now to select complaints about public services or about the Code of Conduct.

Complaint Checker. A tool to check whether we can investigate a complaint or not.

[Try out our new Complaint Checker.](#)

Our newly updated Advice and Advocacy Bodies list. This comprehensive list is designed to help the public find the assistance they need when making a complaint, or if we are unable to investigate their complaint. Whether they're seeking advice or advocacy, our updated directory will guide them to the right support.

[Watch our video for step-by-step instructions on how to access and use the list.](#)

Easy Read tab. We now have a dedicated tab for our Easy Read documents. Easy Read documents are designed to make information accessible for everyone, especially those with learning disabilities. They use simple language and clear visuals to ensure understanding for all.

[Read EasyRead versions of our documents.](#)

Outreach

We continue to take advantage of opportunities to build awareness of our service among groups that have been under-represented amongst our complainants:

- Welsh language speakers,
- disabled people,
- people from diverse nationalities and ethnicities
- young people,
- people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.

Since November, we used opportunities to promote improvement and raise awareness of our office at:

- TPAS Cymru Conference
- Cardiff South West Cluster Healthy Lifestyle Event
- Community Housing Cymru Conference

Please contact our Communications Team at communication@ombudsman.wales to discuss any outreach activities.

To join the press list for PSOW news, please email us at communication@ombudsman.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 committed to supporting the Welsh language and its speakers. You can find more information on how we comply with the Welsh language standards on our website [here](#).



Want to learn more about our work?

Visit our website



Would you rather we did not contact you with our news?

Let us know at communications@ombudsman.wales