

# Ombwdsmon Ombudsman

OMBWDSMON GWASANAETHAU CYHOEDDUS CYMRU  
PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES

## Annual Report and Accounts Executive summary

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2021 / 2022



## About us

We have three main roles.

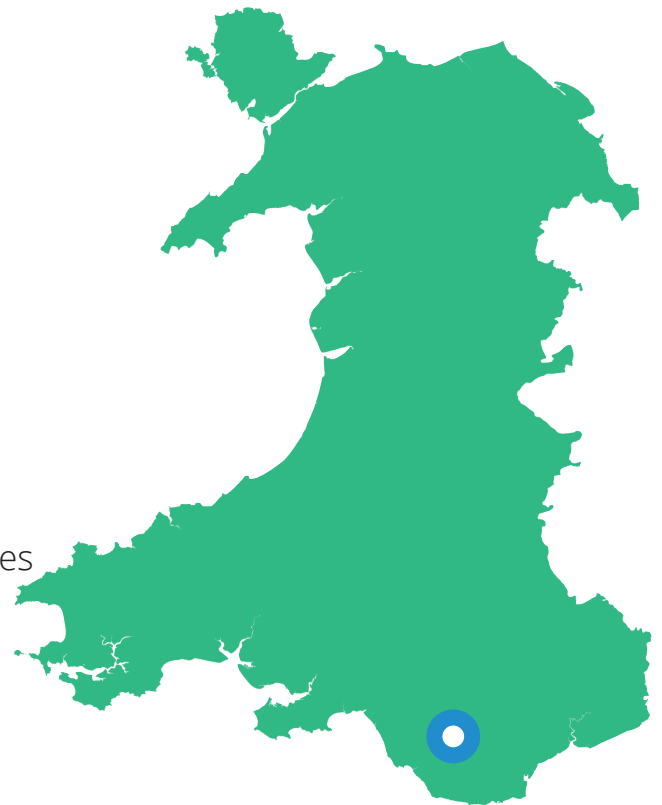
- We investigate complaints about public services.
- We consider complaints about councillors breaching the Code of Conduct.
- We drive systemic improvement of public services.

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

## How to find us

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## Highlights of the year

2021/22 was the final year of Nick Bennett's term of office as Ombudsman, a position he held since 2014. The last year was a challenging one for the office, with 32% more cases than the year before. We closed more complaints than ever, providing answers and putting things right for the people of Wales.

We welcomed Michelle Morris as Ombudsman from April 2022. Michelle is developing her Strategic Plan setting out how we will work to continue to deliver a fair and independent complaints service, for those dissatisfied with public services, and use the learning from complaints to make improvements.



## We have continued to deliver for those who have suffered injustice during the pandemic.

We received this year a record number of new cases - 32% more than last year and 14% more than in 2019/20.

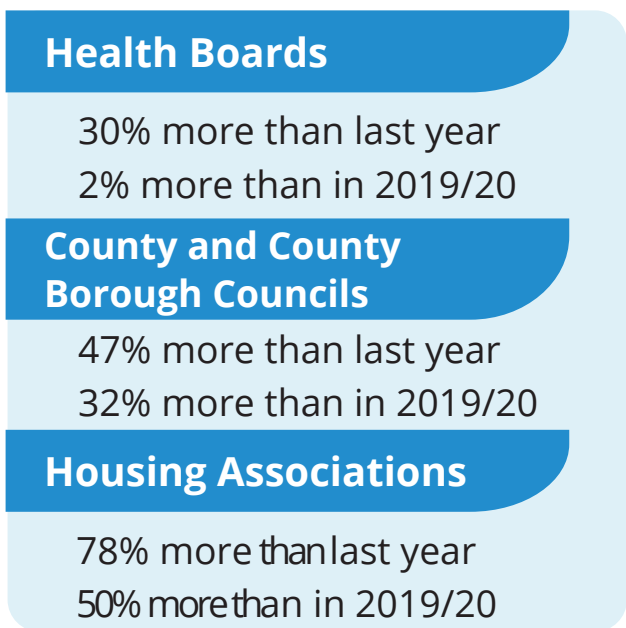


We delivered justice to more people in Wales by closing a record 2865 complaints about public services and the Code of Conduct - 29% more than last year and 14% more than in 2019/20.

### Complaints about public services

We saw more new complaints about:

People complained to us mainly about:



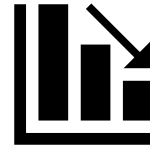
## Our interventions

459

18%

We found that something had gone wrong and had to intervene in 459 or about 18% of complaints about public services that we closed this year.

That was a lower proportion than in the last two years (20%).



69%

in 69%, we proposed Early Resolution to deliver justice quickly.

“The service was excellent, and the outcome achieved was positive. I could not have achieved this outcome without assistance from the ombudsman’s office. They helped me to achieve a sense of fairness.”

31%

in 31%, we intervened after investigating.

## Our recommendations

1,131

We issued 1131 recommendations to public service providers.

£132k

We recommended over £132,000 of financial redress – compared to £62,000 last year and £80,000 in 2019/20.

“We take comfort in the thought that all involved have learned some meaningful lessons and hopefully, as a result of your investigation, no other family may experience the situation we found ourselves in.”

26%

26% of our recommendations this year were about process change, more training or more information for staff.



Find all the complaints data that we refer to in this Report [on our website here.](#)

## Complaints about the Code of Conduct

Compared to last year, we received fewer complaints about the Code of Conduct. However, last year the volume of those complaints was unusually high. Compared to 2019/20, we received many more new Code of Conduct complaints.



We again saw more complaints about members of Town and Community Councils (2% more than last year and 27% more than in 2019/20).



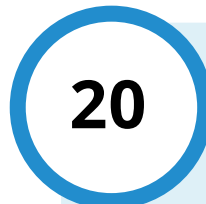
About a half of our new complaints about the Code of Conduct (51%) was about the promotion of equality and respect - a slightly lower proportion than last year (55%).

Although we closed slightly fewer Code of Conduct complaints than last year, we investigated a much higher proportion - 14%, compared to 8% last year.

In cases where we investigate and have evidence to suggest there may have been a serious breach of the Code of Conduct, we refer the complaint and our findings to a local standards committee or to the Adjudication Panel for Wales.

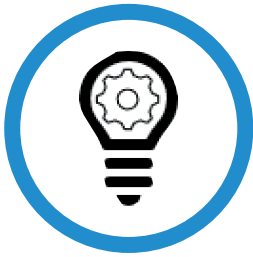


These bodies upheld and found breaches in all our referrals they considered in 2021/22. This gives us additional assurance that our process for considering these complaints is sound.



In 2021/22, we referred 20 complaints about the Code of Conduct to the Standards Committees of the relevant local authorities, or the Adjudication Panel for Wales. This was twice as many as last year. We are concerned about this increase.

“ I recognise the understanding and professionalism shown in your contribution to the hearing and deliberation on its outcome. Please accept my gratitude for your management of the case.



## We are proactive, helping the public sector improve during challenging times.

Despite the significant increase in our workload this year, we continued to promote learning from our complaints and improve broader public services.



We issued our Model Complaints Handling Policy and accompanying guidance to an initial 8 Housing Associations – bringing the total of bodies under Complaints Standards to 39.



We provided 140 virtual training sessions to public bodies across Wales



We published on our website statistics about complaints made to County and County Borough Councils for the first time.



We issued 7 public interest reports.



We issued updated guidance – **'Principles of Good Administration'** and **'Good Records Management Matters'**.



We launched the findings of our first wider Own Initiative Investigation –

**'Homelessness Reviewed: An open door to positive change'**.



We completed 3 extended investigations (where we were already investigating a problem and extended the investigation to other issues or complainants).



We published our third Equality and Human Rights Casebook.



We launched the **'Our Findings'** tool on our website, which replaces our traditional casebooks.



## We embrace learning and welcome feedback.

We do our best to make sure that we handle complaints fairly and in a transparent way. People who are unhappy with our decisions can ask for a review if they can show we did not properly consider the information they sent us, or if they can send us additional, new evidence.

**260**

We handled 260 review requests.

**20%** more than last year

**12%** more than in 2019/20

**7%**

We upheld only 7% of the review requests we closed – a lower proportion than last year (9%). Although there is always more work for us to do to improve, this gives us confidence in our decisions.

We want to deliver an excellent service. To check how well we do that, we invite feedback from people who complain to us and from the bodies in our jurisdiction. We use that feedback to improve how we work.

**26**

This year, 26 public bodies attended our Sounding Boards. They gave us good feedback but were broadly satisfied with our service.

Our workload pressures had an effect, with fewer service users happy with our service this year. We are working on a detailed action plan to improve how we work based on this feedback.

**43%**

43% of our complainants that we asked were happy with our customer service – compared to 51% in 2020/21. However, people were much happier with our service when they were also happy with the outcome of their complaint.

We received

**32**

complaints about us.

We upheld or partially upheld 41% - compared to 22% last year.



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

We are accountable to the Senedd for how we work and how we use our resources.

**£**

Our budget this year was £5.2m.

**£491**

Our unit cost per case this year was £491.

**77%**

We applied 77% of our resources to complaints handling.

**91%**

91% of our budgeted funding for new powers (£332k) was spent on implementation.

We understand that we need to play our part in protecting the environment and continue to develop sustainable working practices.



We produced just over 9000kg of waste - 255% more than last year, but 66% less than in 2019/20.



We used 2% more energy than last year, but 29% less than in 2019/20.



We sent 0% of our general waste to landfill.



We avoided 176 kg of CO2 in emissions



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





## We strive to ensure and promote equality, diversity and inclusion.

We work to make sure that people are aware of and trust our service - and that we are accessible to all who need us. We had some successes this year, but have more work to do.

**43%**

43% of people who responded to a national survey knew about us (compared to 48% in 2020).

**80%**

80% of our complainants that we asked said that it was easy to contact us (compared to 85% last year).

**221**

We took 221 oral complaints (compared to 63 last year) and our first complaint in British Sign Language.

“ Immensely helpful. I have dyslexia and wouldn't have been able to submit a complaint otherwise.

We are committed to creating an equal, diverse, and inclusive workplace.



86% of those who responded agreed that we are committed to creating a diverse, equal and inclusive workplace.



We again achieved the Chwarae Teg FairPlay Employer award at silver level, and reduced our median Gender Pay Gap to 3%, from 5% last year.



We achieved Autism Awareness Employer Status.



## We pull together and support each other.

We value and support our staff. The challenges that we faced during the year affected their health and wellbeing. We worked hard to support them during the year and will carry on this work in 2022/23, as we expect our workload to remain high.

**100%**

All our staff completed their annual appraisal process.

**72%**

72% of our staff completed 28 hours or more of continuing professional development.

**2.7%**

The average percentage of working days lost through staff sickness increased from 1.1% to 2.7%. This was largely because of long-term absences due to stress, mostly not work-related.

Of people who responded to our staff survey this year,

**87%**

said that PSOW was a good place to work, down from 96% in 2020.

**61%**

said that they had sufficient resources to do their work, down from 90% in 2020.

**93%**

said that their working arrangements were sufficiently flexible to allow them to balance their work and home life priorities, up from 87% in 2020.

**58%**

felt that workload pressure was reasonable, down from 76% in 2020.

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