



Annual Report Executive Summary

A summary of the 2016/17 Annual Report of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

INNOVATION  IMPROVEMENT  INFLUENCE

I am delighted to be able to report substantial progress in the activities of the office over the past year, with specific reference to our three year strategic themes of innovation, improvement and influence, which have led to substantial increases in outcomes for complainants and, I hope, positive impacts on public services.

In terms of innovation the office made further progress on compliance, ensuring that recommendations for improvement are implemented and that we ensure that the learning from complaints is acted upon.

The improvement function has started well. All Improvement Officers have developed specific action plans for the relevant bodies in jurisdiction this has led to a number of specific improvements in their complaint handling cultures.

One area of particular improvement was the improvement on timescales – with a move towards complainant centred timescales. The establishment of the Code Advisory Group has meant the proactive oversight of code of conduct complaints, and a seven per cent reduction in cases taking longer than six months.

I was delighted that my first thematic report on Out of Hours services led to a peer review by the Welsh Government to be implemented throughout 2017. I produced a further thematic report Ending Groundhog Day, Lessons from Poor Complaint Handling in March 2017.

In 2016/17 there was a further increase in the use of Voluntary Settlement, an increase of some 26% per cent on the previous year. However, whilst this can lead to speedier resolution for complainants and cheaper processes for public services, it is important that Early Resolution is not seen as some form of easy escape for bodies in my jurisdiction.

I published six public interest reports in the course of the year, three of which were in relation to Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, a number of health reports also related to Out of Hours services.

In May 2016 I issued a Section 22 report against Hywel Dda University Health Board when it failed to comply with an Early Resolution agreement. I expect the same level of compliance to an Early Resolution as with a recommendation emanating from an investigation.

In terms of our influence and collaboration with other bodies inside and outside Wales, 2016/17 was a busy year. We implemented joint Internal Audit arrangements with the Older People and the Children's Commissioners and also implemented payroll arrangements for the Future Generations Commissioner. I was also delighted to participate in Wales Audit Office events on complaints in both North and South Wales. Memoranda of Understanding were signed with a number of Commissioners and Healthcare Inspectorate Wales.

During 2016/17 we submitted a Regulatory Impact Assessment to the Finance Committee and I am very hopeful that the legislation will now be taken forward in 2017/18.

Finally, 2016/17 was a year of not just positive activity, but of positive outcomes. Despite the challenge of increasing workloads the number of complainants who received a positive outcome from my office, either through voluntary settlement or an upheld complaint, increased by 16 per cent!

Nick Bennett, Ombudsman



THE ROLE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales considers complaints about public services providers in Wales, as well as complaints that members of local authorities have broken the Code of Conduct. He is independent of all government bodies and the service that he provides is free of charge.

2015/16

5,999

3,731 Enquiries

1,992 Public Body Complaints

276 Code of Conduct Complaints

4,512 Enquiries

2,056 Public Body Complaints

236 Code of Conduct Complaints

6,804

2016/17



Staff Numbers

TOTAL

58

16
MALE

42
FEMALE

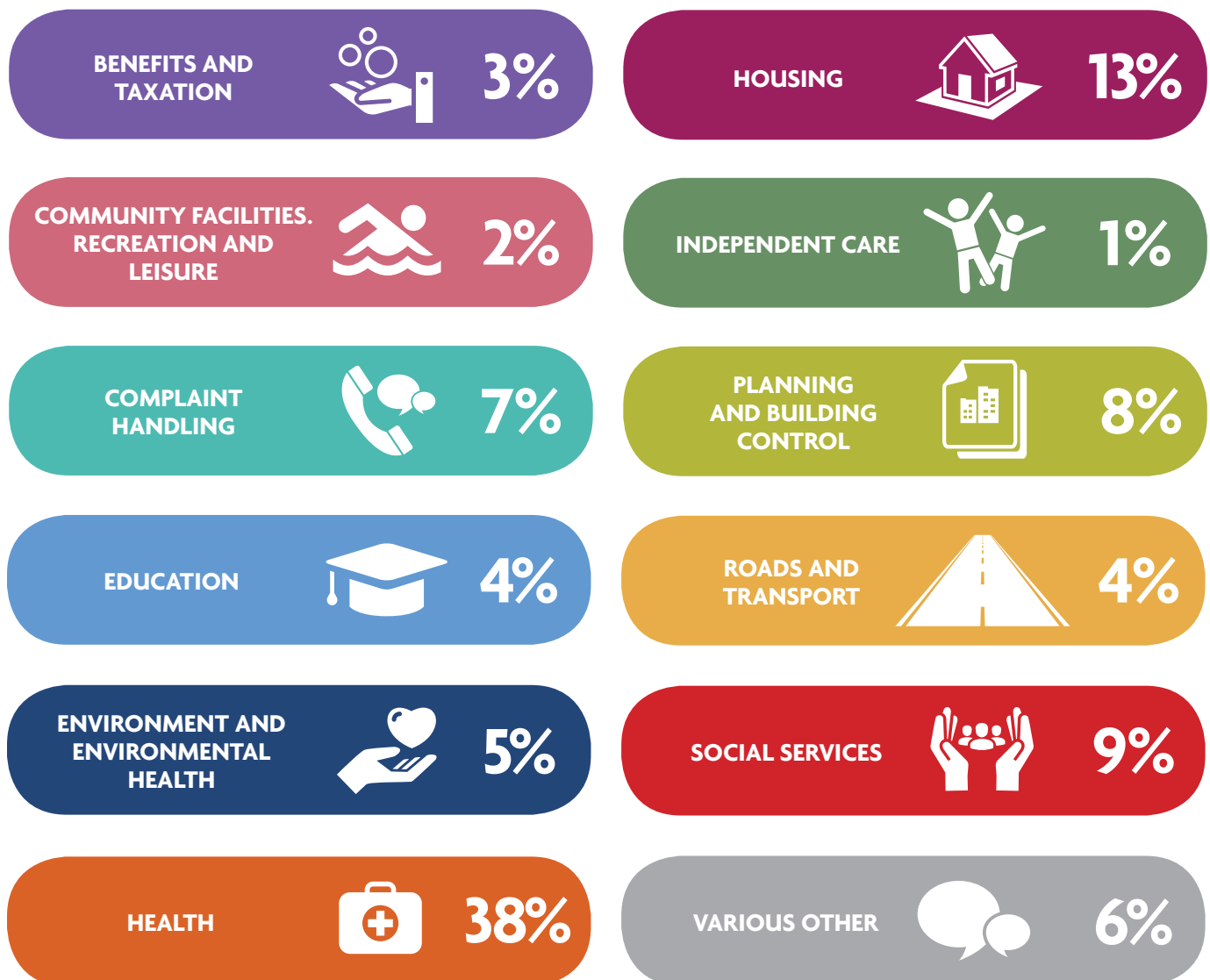
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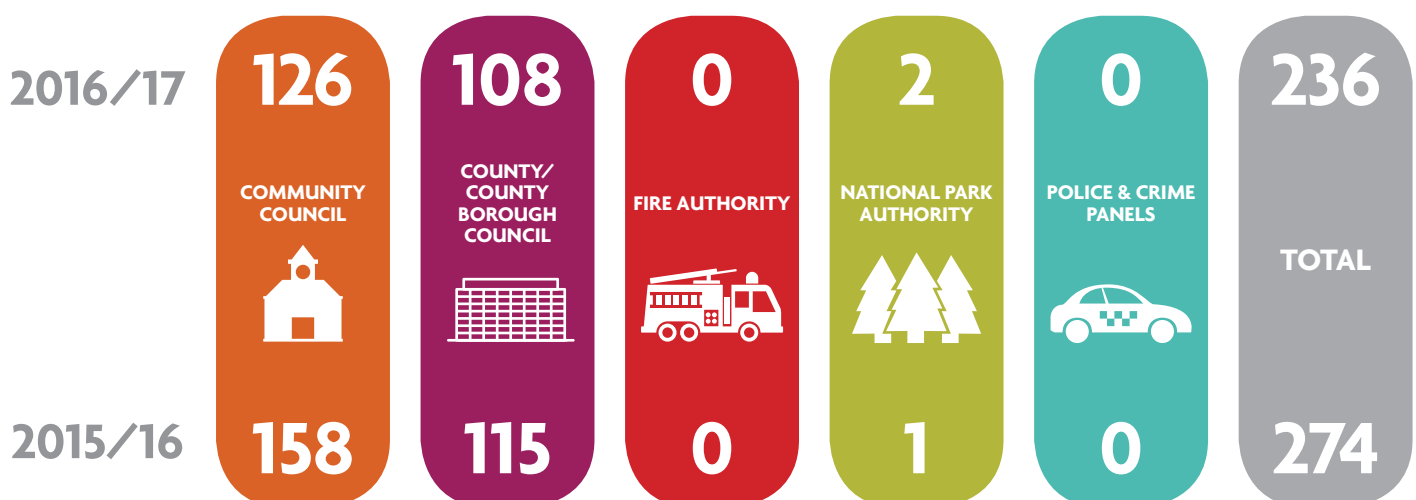
OUR BUDGET
£4,090K

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COMPLAINTS ABOUT PUBLIC BODIES BY SUBJECT

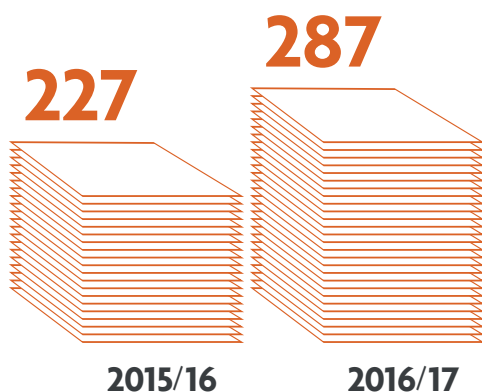


CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS RECEIVED

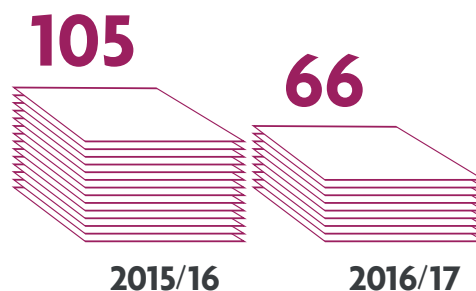


COMPLAINTS ABOUT A PUBLIC BODY

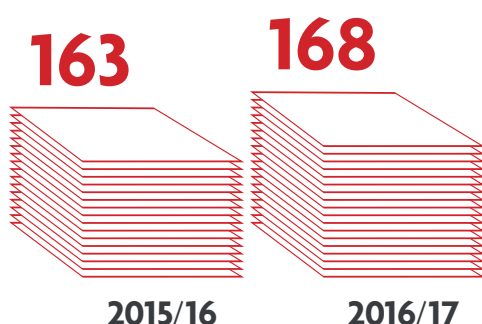
COMPLAINT SETTLED VOLUNTARILY



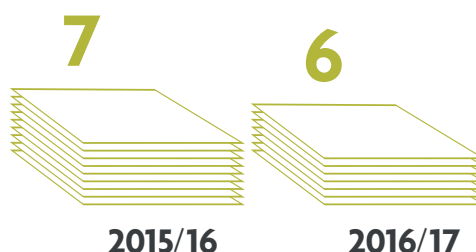
INVESTIGATION: COMPLAINT NOT UPHELD



INVESTIGATION: COMPLAINT UPHELD IN WHOLE OR IN PART



INVESTIGATION: COMPLAINT UPHELD IN WHOLE OR IN PART – PUBLIC INTEREST REPORT



INVESTIGATION: COMPLAINT UPHELD IN WHOLE OR IN PART - SPECIAL REPORT (FAILURE TO COMPLY)



CASE OF NOTE

Rob Johnson, 18, complained to my office that the Council had not managed his savings properly and in accordance with its policy. He said that some of his savings were wrongly used to pay for trips for which he should have received a special allowance.

My investigation found that the Council had failed to keep adequate records or retain Mr Johnson's saving books at the end of his fostering placement and it was unclear why his savings were as low as they were. These failings, amongst others, amounted to maladministration and my office calculated a figure for appropriate recompense for his savings.

Initially Bridgend Council refused to pay the amount but at a later date did make the £3,310 payment in full.

Mr Johnson said he was "over the moon" with the outcome, adding:

“It just shows that making a complaint does make a difference.”

6 PUBLIC INTEREST REPORTS



1 SPECIAL REPORT



SNAPSHOT OF THE YEAR 2016/17

April

Published our new three-year strategic plan 'Innovation, Influence and Improvement'



May

Issued the first ever special report against a Health Board under Section 22 of the PSOW Act



June

Held our first meeting of the Service User Sounding Board comprising representatives from voluntary and advocacy groups to feedback on accessibility and of our service and processes

Chaired the Academi Wales summer school

Participated in Wales Audit Office complaints seminars



September

Took steps to improve transparency and openness by publishing our first open data spreadsheet – a list of all complaints closed by the office during 2015/16



August

Exhibited at the National Eisteddfod in Abergavenny

Issued updated Code of Conduct Guidance for county and town/ community councillors



July

Our annual report highlighted a 4% rise in Welsh NHS complaints

Issued the Annual Letters to Health Boards and County Councils



October

Held a joint seminar with The WISERD-Centre for Welsh Politics and Society, Aberystwyth University, the Ombudsman Association and the International Ombudsman Institute to discuss the Ombudsman in a decade of public policy change

Elected as a Director of International Ombudsman Institute



November

Held our first Health Sector Sounding Board meeting Issued three public interest reports against Health Boards



December

Welsh Government committed to conducting a peer review of out of hours care following a recommendation in our thematic report last year

Issued a public interest report against Bridgend County Borough Council for not monitoring a looked-after child's savings while he was in care, eventually resulting in him receiving the full amount back



March

Raised awareness of our work at the first Wales Council for Voluntary Action's annual conference

Published the second thematic report in 12 months - 'Ending Groundhog Day: Lessons from Poor Complaint Handling' which looked at failings in investigations by public bodies in Wales



February

Launched the pilot of a tool to help investigators consider human rights in Ombudsman casework



January

Held awareness session on the role of the Ombudsman for Assembly Members

