

Our ref: NB/LJ/MA



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1 September 2017

Sent by email: Mr Stephen Gillingham, stephen.gillingham@blaenau-gwent.gov.uk

Dear Mr Gillingham

Annual Letter 2016/17

Following the recent publication of my Annual Report I am delighted to provide you with the Annual Letter (2016/17) for **Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council**.

Overall my office's caseload has increased by 13% this year, with public body complaints seeing a 3% increase.

Once again there has been a further rise in the percentage of health complaints, from 36% to 38%. Housing (13%), Social Services (9%) and Planning and Building Control (8%) remain other significant areas of complaint.

The number of Code of Conduct complaints decreased by 14% from 2015/16 and I am particularly pleased about this as historically my office experiences a surge in complaints in the year leading up to local elections.

It is concerning that of the 18 local authorities that agreed with my office to implement recommendations, only 10 of them complied 100% within the target time set. My office will be looking closely at compliance levels over the coming year.

During 2016/17, I produced six public interest reports and one 'special report'. All but one of the investigations were health related and, worryingly, three of the cases were against the same hospital – Ysbyty Glan Clwyd run by Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board. The special report, issued against Hywel Dda University Health Board for failing to implement my recommendations following an early resolution, was the first of its kind against a health board and underlines the need to comply with commitments made through early resolution in the same way as I would expect for recommendations arising from upheld complaints.

The remaining public interest report related to a local authority's role in overseeing the savings of looked after children.

Earlier this year I issued a thematic report entitled [Ending Groundhog Day: Lessons from Poor Complaints Handling](#). This highlighted cases from across devolved public services in

Wales where investigations by public bodies have been inadequate and failed the service user. The report emphasised the need for effective governance across the Welsh public sector, robust staff training and improved methods of data collection. If you have not considered the report I would encourage you to do so.

I continue to place importance on the improvement function of my office. Last year I assigned Improvement Officers to several bodies and this will continue in 2017/18. In engaging with these bodies we hope to see ongoing improvements in complaints handling, learning and putting things right, along with the governance arrangements necessary for continuous improvement.

I am hopeful that the National Assembly will shortly be introducing new Ombudsman legislation that will help drive up standards. It is important that Wales continues to adopt best practice in complaint handling and public service improvement and does not get left behind.

In reference to your local authority I am pleased to see that complaints received by my office dropped from 19 to 12. Investigations increased from 0 in 2015/16 to 2. Planning and Building Control (4) was the most complained about area, and I am glad to see that Environment and Environmental Health which has been the problem area for the last couple of years didn't receive any complaints this year. PSOW intervention was required in 25% of cases closed this year.

You will find below a factsheet giving a breakdown of complaints data relating to your Local Authority. This year we have included a new set of statistics regarding Ombudsman interventions. These include all cases upheld by my office as well as early resolutions and voluntary settlements.

This correspondence has been copied to the Leader of the Council for consideration by the cabinet. I will also be sending a copy to your Contact Officer within your organisation and would again reiterate the importance of this role. Finally, a copy of all annual letters will be published on my website.

Yours sincerely



Nick Bennett

Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

CC: Cllr Nigel Daniels, Leader

Angela O'Leary, Contact Officer

Factsheet

A. Complaints Received and Investigated with Local Authority average adjusted by population

Local Authority	Complaints Received	Average	Complaints Investigated	Average
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	12	19	2	1
Bridgend County Borough Council	44	39	2	2
Caerphilly County Borough Council	54	50	2	2
Cardiff Council	143	99	3	4
Carmarthenshire County Council	44	51	2	2
Ceredigion County Council	32	21	2	1
City and County of Swansea	52	67	3	3
Conwy County Borough Council	28	32	1	1
Denbighshire County Council	24	26	0	1
Flintshire County Council	39	43	4	2
Gwynedd Council	32	34	1	1
Isle of Anglesey County Council	24	19	0	1
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council	10	16	1	1
Monmouthshire County Council	18	26	1	1
Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council	38	39	0	2
Newport City Council	26	41	1	2
Pembrokeshire County Council	29	34	1	1
Powys County Council	54	37	4	1
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council	47	66	0	3
Torfaen County Borough Council	23	25	1	1
Vale of Glamorgan Council	41	35	1	1
Wrexham County Borough Council	46	38	1	1

B. Complaints Received by Subject with Local Authority average

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	Complaints Received	LA Average
Benefits Administration	1	1
Children's Social Services	2	4
Community Facilities, Recreation and Leisure	1	1
Planning and Building Control	4	7
Roads and Transport	2	3
Various Other	2	3

C. Comparison of complaint outcomes with average outcomes for Local Authorities, adjusted for population distribution

Local Authority	Out of Jurisdiction	Premature	'Other' cases closed after initial consideration	Discontinued	Early Resolution/ Voluntary Settlement	S16 Report - Upheld in whole or in part	Other Report Upheld - in whole or in part	Other Report - Not Upheld	Withdrawn	Total Cases Closed
Blaenau Gwent	4	3	2	0	3	0	0	0	0	12
Blaenau Gwent (adjusted)	4	6	7	0	2	0	0	0	0	20

D. Number of cases with PSOW intervention

Local Authority	Number of complaints with PSOW intervention	Total number of closed complaints	% of complaints with PSOW intervention
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	3	12	25
Bridgend County Borough Council	5	42	12
Caerphilly County Borough Council	4	55	7
Cardiff Council	19	133	14
Carmarthenshire County Council	6	47	13
Ceredigion County Council	8	39	21
City and County of Swansea	4	54	7
Conwy County Borough Council	4	33	12
Denbighshire County Council	0	27	0
Flintshire County Council	13	41	32
Gwynedd Council	5	33	15
Isle of Anglesey County Council	3	27	11
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council	3	10	30
Monmouthshire County Council	3	22	14
Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council	3	38	8
Newport City Council	7	30	23
Pembrokeshire County Council	4	33	12
Powys County Council	9	53	17
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council	6	48	13
Torfaen County Borough Council	2	22	9
Vale of Glamorgan Council	9	39	23
Wrexham County Borough Council	13	47	28

E. Code of Conduct Complaints Closed

Local Authority	Closed after initial consideration	Discontinued	No evidence of breach	No action necessary	Refer to Standards Committee	Refer to Adjudication Panel	Withdrawn	Total Cases Closed
Blaenau Gwent	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

Appendix

Explanatory Notes

Section A compares the number of complaints against the Local Authority which were received and investigated by my office during 2016/17, with the Local Authority average (adjusted for population distribution) during the same period.

Section B provides a breakdown of the number of complaints about the Local Authority which were received by my office during 2016/17 with the Local Authority average for the same period. The figures are broken down into subject categories.

Section C compares the complaint outcomes for the Local Authority during 2016/17, with the average outcome (adjusted for population distribution) during the same period. Public Interest reports issued under section 16 of the Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Act 2005 are recorded as 'Section 16'.

Section D provides the numbers and percentages of cases received by the PSOW in which an intervention has occurred. This includes all upheld complaints, early resolutions and voluntary settlements.

Section E provides a breakdown of all Code of Conduct complaint outcomes against Councillors during 2016/17.

Feedback

We welcome your feedback on the enclosed information, including suggestions for any information to be enclosed in future annual summaries. Any feedback or queries should be sent to lucy.john@ombudsman-wales.org.uk or matthew.aplin@ombudsman-wales.org.uk