

Strategic Plan

2009/10 to 2011/12

Update: Year 2

Contributing to Excellence

Foreword by the Ombudsman

The Strategic Plan was originally published last year and set out some stretching targets for the three years to 2011/12. This year's update of the Plan is designed to build on the achievements of the current year and sets out an ambitious programme for the year ahead. Our Vision, Values, Purpose and Strategic Objectives continue to be appropriate, and are restated here. The objectives for the year ahead, however, are designed to move the service forward, and build on the innovative approaches to engaging with complainants introduced this year.

Our core business remains dealing with complaints from members of the public about public services in Wales or that councillors have not complied with their Code of Conduct. My staff have worked diligently and effectively through the year to make sure that we do this well.

We sought during 2009/10 to make it easier to contact my service, particularly for people who may have challenges of access, and to give people clear guidance about what we can and cannot do. We will consolidate these developments next year, and also develop a new Signposting service which will help service users in Wales to complain about public services.

In the past year we have also streamlined our complaints processes, in response to consistently high levels of demand from complainants and the need to be as efficient as possible in our use of public funds. We will be working this year to maximise the improvements in order to deal with complaints as speedily as possible, while being conscious of our commitment to objectivity and properly establishing the facts.

As well as seeking redress for individuals who have suffered injustice, we also place considerable emphasis on seeking to identify broader lessons to ensure that services can be improved. We will during the year instigate annual letters to all major providers of public services in Wales bringing together the lessons from complaints we have received about them in the course of the year. We will also build on our work with regulators and representative bodies to ensure that the learning from our work is widely disseminated.

In 2009/10, we developed guidance for Councillors on their Code of Conduct. In the year ahead we will work with key partners to ensure that training is delivered to councillors which takes account of the guidance. This work will contribute to addressing concerns about public confidence in the democratic process.

Complaints provide a vital insight for service providers into issues which arise when people use their services. Improved complaint handling within the public service in Wales has a number of key benefits. First, individuals who have suffered from a poor service or failed to have a service delivered to which they were entitled can have their issues addressed. Secondly, services can learn lessons individually and collectively which mean that the right decision is made in the first place more often. Thirdly, services can be improved for all by learning lessons about process, regulation and delivery.

In order to secure consistency and shared best practice, the Welsh Assembly Government has established a working group which I chair to introduce a common approach across the public sector in Wales. I hope next year to see real progress in realising this ambitious vision.

We recognise that people complain because they are unhappy with the service they have received or which they have been denied. The best possible response is to deliver services in a way which prevents complaints from arising, but realistically, we know that mistakes will be made. Our job, in responding to complainants and working with bodies in jurisdiction and partners, is to try to reduce the number of mistakes made, to avoid mistakes being repeated and to ensure that lessons are learned which contribute to better public services for all. This plan intended to ensure that we deliver on these aspirations.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Tyndall', written in a cursive style.

Peter Tyndall
Ombudsman

Our vision

To contribute to the development of excellent public services in Wales by ensuring that service providers continue to value and learn from complaints.

Our values

Accessibility – to be open to everyone from all of our communities and work to ensure that people who face challenges in access are not excluded. We will be courteous, respectful and approachable, and communicate with complainants in the way they tell us they prefer.

Excellence – to be professional and authoritative in all that we do and promote excellence in the services with which we work.

Learning – we believe that we should improve through learning from our own experiences and should help others to learn from theirs.

Fairness – we will maintain our independence and reach decisions objectively having carefully considered the facts.

Effectiveness – we will make sure that we use resources to secure best value for the public purse.

Being good employers – we will continue to invest in our well trained and well motivated staff.

Our purposes

- To consider complaints about public bodies.
- To consider complaints that members of local authorities have broken the code of conduct.
- To put things right – we aim to put people back in the position they would have been in if they had not suffered an injustice, and work to secure the best possible outcome where injustice has occurred.
- To recognise and share good practice.
- To work with public bodies so that lessons from our investigations are learnt.
- To ensure continued improvement in the standards of public services in Wales by helping bodies to get it right first time – we will work to reduce complaints by helping service providers to improve their initial decision making.

Strategic aims

The strategic aims set out are ones we look to achieve over the life of this three year plan. Below are the key priorities and targets for this second year (i.e. 2010/11).

Detailed objectives and targets for 2010/11 will be set in the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales's annual Operational Plan.

Strategic Aim 1: To raise awareness of our service so that people understand what we do, and that all who need it can access it and make use of it.

Key priorities for 2010/11:

- To produce further subject specific factsheets for members of the public to supplement our general information leaflet.
- Further enhance the information on our website, to provide better advice to potential complainants.
- For the new public services complaints signposting service:
 - develop a distinct and separate identity
 - develop a website
 - produce publicity material
 - formally launch for the new service.
- Further develop our arrangements for making our service accessible to all, with particular focus this year on the needs of blind/visually impaired and deaf people.
- Continue to hold meetings with voluntary/advocacy organisations that specifically engage with communities who may be particularly vulnerable to exclusion from our service.

Strategic Aim 2: To have in place high quality complaints handling processes, which consider and determine complaints thoroughly but proportionately, and convey decisions clearly.

Key priorities for 2010/11:

- Review the effectiveness of the first contact arrangements (i.e. Complaints Advice Team) introduced during 2009/10 and make any necessary changes/improvements.
- Review our revised complaints handling procedures, including:
 - putting in place the necessary arrangements for the anticipated increased in health complaints as a result of changes to the NHS complaints procedure emanating from the NHS Redress Measure
 - secure and maximise the improvements in throughput made possible by our streamlined processes.
- Ensure that investigations take full account of any potential human rights breaches in complaints we receive.

Strategic Aim 3: To work with public bodies in Wales so that better quality public services are provided as a result of the lessons that can be learnt from the complaints we investigate.

Key priorities for 2010/11:

- Develop a public service complaints signposting service that will help complainants make their complaints to bodies in our jurisdiction.
- Improve our arrangements for capturing lessons learnt from the complaints we investigate.
- Develop our communications so that best practice and lessons learnt can more easily and effectively be shared with public bodies, which will include the introduction of annual letters for major providers.
- With the Welsh Assembly Government, continue with the work of developing a common complaints procedure for public bodies in Wales and seek opportunities to promote good complaint handling principles and practices.
- Contribute to the Welsh Assembly Government's reform of the funding of care, by sharing our learning on existing problems resulting from disparate social care and health care funding systems.
- Hold regional seminars for local authority members on the guidance issued in 2009/10 on the new Code of Conduct.

Strategic Aim 4: To demonstrate that our resources are efficiently and effectively deployed.

Key priorities for 2010/11:

- Support the Audit Committee in its expanded role.
- Continue our improvements to staff development by systematically developing our training and other programmes to ensure a strong linkage between our strategic objectives and our workforce development, with the eventual aim of being recognised as Investors in People.
- Further develop existing Information and Communications Technology systems, so that:
 - they are able to support changes introduced to first contact and complaint handling arrangements, and also the new complaints signposting service
 - take the steps necessary to procure an upgrade or replacement of the complaints handling administration system.
- Instigate systems for recording the outcomes of the planned changes including surveying users of the new first contact arrangements and measuring changes in the time taken to process complaints.
- Ensure that the necessary office accommodation and associated facilities are in place for the signposting service and other developments.
- Ensure that all developments are managed within the agreed budget.
- Further build upon our risk management arrangements so that these support strategic prioritisation and decision making.
- Consider the obligation arising from HM Treasury's commitment to sustainability reporting that will become compulsory in 2011/12.

gets

Key Delivery Targets

The key delivery targets below have been set to underpin the strategic aims of this three year plan and the key priorities set for 2010/11.

Service Delivery Area	Target	Underpinning
Signposting Service	By April 2011 we will have developed and introduced a new public services complaints signposting service for Wales.	Strategic Aims 1 and 3
Complaints Handling	By April 2011 we will have reviewed our new process and procedures for considering and investigating complaints, making any necessary changes.	Strategic Aims 1 and 2
Communication	By April 2011 we will have held a launch for the new complaints signposting service and have in place associated communication materials and mechanisms. We will have also further developed regular communications channels with bodies in jurisdiction.	Strategic Aims 1, 2 and 3
Governance/ Effective use of resources	By April 2011 we will have introduced new IT systems to underpin our work.	Strategic Aim 4

Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

April 2010

1 Ffordd yr Hen Gae
Pencoed
CF35 5LJ

Tel: **01656 641150**

Fax: **01656 641199**

E-mail: **ask@ombudsman-wales.org.uk**

Web: **www.ombudsman-wales.org.uk**