

## Annual Review of the Advisory Panel 2016/17

### 1. Background

- 1.1 This paper reviews the effectiveness and work of the Advisory Panel during 2016/17. This is fourth such review since the Panel was established in 2012. As with the annual reviews of previous years, it takes account of the views expressed by Panel Members in the self assessment appraisal forms that they completed during February 2017.

### 2. Role of the Panel

- 2.1 The Advisory Panel is a non-statutory forum whose main role is to provide support and advice to the Ombudsman in providing leadership and good governance of the office of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. The Advisory Panel also brings an external perspective to assist in the development of policy and practice.

- 2.2 The Advisory Panel provides specific advice and support to the Ombudsman on:

- vision, values and purposes;
- strategic direction and planning;
- accountability to citizens for the public funds it receives;
- internal control and risk management arrangements.

- 2.3 The Advisory Panel is an advisory only body to the Ombudsman, and does not make decisions in its own right.

- 2.4 The Panel also assists the Ombudsman in establishing:

- governance arrangements, including Terms of Reference of any sub-committees;
- the PSOW's strategic direction, aims and objectives and targets;
- key business policies;
- key employment strategies and policies

and scrutinising and assuring:

- the Three Year Strategic Plan and the Annual Business Plan;
- high level budget allocation;
- the budget estimates submission to the Finance Committee of the National Assembly for Wales;
- resource accounts (delegated to the Audit & Risk Committee);
- capital investment/contracts (over £250k) (delegated to the Audit & Risk Committee).

2.5 It also monitors and reviews:

- risk and internal control (delegated to the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee);
- operational performance and delivery;
- financial performance;
- effectiveness of employment strategies and policies;
- diversity and equal opportunities, particularly in relation to the Equality Act 2010;
- external communications strategies and stakeholder relations;
- health and safety and business continuity.

### **3. Membership**

3.1 Membership comprises:

- the Ombudsman (Chair due to constitutional accountability considerations)
- up to six external members (who offer specific skills and experience sought by the Ombudsman and one of whom may be from another ombudsman office).

3.2 The Policy & Communications Manager acts as Secretary to the Panel; other Management Team members as decided by the Ombudsman may be in attendance at the Panel's meetings but are not formally members of the PSOW Advisory Panel.

3.3 Panel Members are recruited via open recruitment exercises, with the latest of these being conducted in the last quarter of 2015/16 following the Ombudsman's decision to strengthen the membership of the Panel (and also the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee).

3.4 The external independent Advisory Panel members throughout 2016/17 were:

Margaret Griffiths  
Jonathan Morgan  
Bill Richardson  
Sharon Warnes  
Jan Williams  
John Williams.

### **4. Meetings**

4.1 Panel Members have continued to demonstrate their commitment to the role with the majority having excellent attendance records in respect of the meetings held over the past year.

4.2 The Panel sets for itself an annual work programme and Panel Members have received a number of regular reports at each meeting, such as progress monitoring against the targets contained in the Strategic and Business Plans; the headline statistics in relation to the complaints caseload and minutes of the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee.

- 4.3 Panel Members also had the opportunity during the year to contribute at an early stage to the development of the annual Operational Plan. They also considered the draft of the estimates paper for 2017/18 prior to submission to the Assembly Finance Committee in September.
- 4.4 A key subject discussed during 2016/17 was the work towards the goal of obtaining new powers for the PSOW.
- 4.5 Also discussed during the year was the Annual Report for 2015/16; a new Communications Strategy as well as a revised Outreach Strategy; the PSOW's staff survey and the action plan put in place to respond to issues raised; and the Independent Complaints Review Service's Annual Report, reporting on complaints made about the PSOW's own service.
- 4.6 Panel Members also showed great interest in the staff survey undertaken during the year, its results, and the actions being taken by the PSOW to respond to issues raised.
- 4.7 During 2016/17 the Panel also had a number of 'discussion items'. This included website development; clinical advice; and the PSOW's quality assurance framework.
- 4.8 As part of the regular arrangements in place, between meetings Panel Members received copies of the Core Brief produced following each Management Team meeting. Panel Members have also received embargoed copies of s16 reports when they have been issued enabling them to be briefed in advance of any potential media coverage. In addition, an embargoed copy of the Ombudsman's thematic report 'Ending Groundhog Day' was also sent to Panel Members.

## **5. Relationship with the Ombudsman's Office**

- 5.1 Panel Members have expressed the view that relationships amongst themselves as an Advisory Panel have been excellent and very strong, and that they work well together. There is a good level of respect between members of the contributions they all bring to the Panel. Panel Members are of the view that they have maintained an effective relationship with the Ombudsman and his management team.
- 5.2 Similarly the view has been expressed that relationship with staff at the Ombudsman's office have been very good, being unfailingly helpful, supportive and courteous. It had been commented that where there had been a need to question issues the response from the management had always been first class. The Panel viewed the team to be easy to work with and that they treated the Panel's input respectfully and professionally.

5.4 All Panel Members have again expressed the view that their relationships with the Ombudsman and staff are very good and positive. Panel Members have all commented that PSOW staff have been happy to assist where necessary and resolve any issues quickly and professionally. The briefings Members receive between meetings has also been appreciated, and it has been expressed that these enable the Panel to provide an appropriate level of professional and informed scrutiny.

**6. Future Considerations**

6.1 Giving thought to future considerations, a number of Members made similar comments associated with the need to fill forthcoming vacancies over the next year or so, and the importance of recruiting suitable members to ensure that a sufficient mix of appropriate skills were brought to the Panel.

**7. Overall Assessment**

7.1 The self-assessment review has presented very positive feedback from all Panel Members in respect of their own roles and objectives in conjunction with the Ombudsman and his staff.

7.2 Members have felt that 2016/17 has been another good year for the Advisory Panel in supporting the Ombudsman. All Panel Members have felt they worked well together and that they have been able to contribute their knowledge and skills to discussions, and that given the range of professional backgrounds they combine to provide a very knowledgeable and experienced forum.

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