

## Annual Review of the Advisory Panel

### 1. Background

- 1.1 This paper reviews the work of the Advisory Panel for 2014/15. The Advisory Panel was established following a review of the PSOW's governance arrangements in December 2011.
- 1.2 This is the third review of the Panel's effectiveness and, as with previous reviews, it takes account of the views expressed by Panel Members in the self assessment appraisal forms that they completed during February 2016.

### 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 2015/16 were:

Margaret Griffiths  
Bill Richardson  
Sharon Warnes  
Jan Williams  
John Williams.

Panel Members were also delighted to welcome Mr Jonathan Morgan to his first meeting of the Advisory Panel on 16 March 2016.

### **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 Three Year Strategic Plan, taking part in a workshop during September. The Panel were also discussed on a confidential, 'in camera' basis, proposals for staffing re-organisation. They also considered the draft of the estimates paper for 2016/17 prior to submission to the Assembly Finance Committee on 7 October. The Panel also considered a draft paper in relation to a proposed supplementary estimate submission in relation to capital fit out costs, dilapidations and potential costs of a long-standing legal case.
- 4.4 A key subject under consideration during 2015/16 was the potential for new PSOW legislation. Throughout the process, Members discussed the Assembly Finance Committee's inquiry into the PSOW's powers, its resultant report, and the Draft PSOW Bill that then ensued. Consideration was also given to the Welsh Government's proposed new local government map and correspondence from the Audit General for Wales in relation to liaison meetings and value for money studies.
- 4.5 During 2015/16 the Panel also had a number of 'discussion items'. This included the new office structure; open data; and risk management
- 4.6 Between meetings, arrangements have been put in place for Panel Members to receive 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 "Out of Hours: A Time to Care", was also sent to Panel Members.

## **5. 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales**

- 5.1 Members of the Panel were also invited to attend the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary reception held at the Senedd on 24 February 2016. This enabled them to meet with a number of key PSOW stakeholders.

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

- 6.1 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.
- 4.6 In addition, Panel Members also completed the arrangement of meeting staff of the various teams within the office during the lunchtime period (with the last of these taking place at the December meeting).

## **7. Training**

- 7.1 Panel Members had during 2014 undertaken a bespoke, in-house 'Essential Skills for Board Members' training session facilitated by a CIPFA Associate. As usual, members were invited to identify additional training requirements during 2015/16.

Whilst no specific requirements were identified during the year, relevant members of the Panel did attend a CIPFA training course in relation to effective audit committees in December 2015.

- 7.2 Whilst Members have been fully engaged during the year in relation to developments as regards potential new PSOW powers, it is being proposed that a suitable training session be arranged during 2016/17 to supplement this, should new legislation be introduced.

## **8. Future Considerations**

- 8.1 Some Panel members as part of the self-assessment review have expressed the view that it can sometimes be challenging to keep abreast of developments more widely in Wales. During the past year the PSOW's office introduced an internal weekly bulletin for staff, which as well as detailing occasions when the Ombudsman has appeared in the news, also includes items of wider 'non-direct' interest to the work of the office. It is suggested that Panel Members may find it useful to receive this as a weekly email.

## **9. Overall Assessment**

- 9.1 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.
- 9.2 All the Panel Members felt they worked well together as a Panel and that the approach from all had been professional, focussed and supportive. It was felt that as a team, the Panel work well together and that their respective skills complemented each other. It was felt that there was very helpful mutual respect between Panel members on the contributions made. Members felt that they discharged their scrutiny role in an incisive but always constructive way and that they pursued the exercise of their collective responsibility in a challenging, but helpful way to the PSOW. It was felt that Members were prepared to question and challenge as well as provide support and that the Advisory Panel was a forum for full and frank discussion of relevant issues such as the strategic aims and objectives. It was also felt that the addition of new/replacement Members was a valuable way of ensuring that the Panel does not become staid.

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