

Advisory Panel Review of the Year 2018/19

1. Background

- 1.1 This paper reviews the effectiveness and work of the Advisory Panel during 2018/19. This is the sixth 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 2019.

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;
- 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.

2.5 It also monitors and reviews:

- 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 and up to six independent external members who offer specific skills and experience including experience of public service sectors and different jurisdictions in both territorial and sectoral senses. The independent external members are also members of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC).
- 3.2 The Director of Policy, Legal & Governance 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 meetings will be chaired by one of the independent external members. In June 2018 the Ombudsman appointed Jonathan Morgan (an independent member of the Panel) to the position of Chair on the recommendation of the Advisory Panel.
- 3.4 One new independent member joined the Panel in September 2018 to replace a member whose term of office concluded at the end of 2017/18.

4. Meetings

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

Panel Member	No. of attendances	Total Possible
Jonathan Morgan (Chair)	4	4
Anne Jones	4	4
Tom Frawley	4	4
Jim Martin	4	4
Trevor Coxon	4	4
Ian Williams (from September)	3	3

- 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 Operational Plans; and the monthly Complaints Monitoring Report.

- 4.3 Panel Members have been fully engaged with the PSOW's work. In June 2018 the members of the Panel attended Governance and Accountability training and in September 2018 the Panel members spent time with each of the Teams in PSOW to better understand the difference roles undertaken in the office.
- 4.4 The Panel's discussions on the casework pressures faced by the PSOW during 2018/19 assisted the Ombudsman and his staff greatly by providing support and advice on how to alleviate pressures and tackle the backlog of work in the office.
- 4.5 Panel Members also had the opportunity to consider the draft of the estimates paper for 2019/20 prior to submission to the Assembly Finance Committee in October.
- 4.6 The Panel discussed in detail the outcome of the PSOW's Staff Survey and were pleased to note improvements in positive responses from staff in all areas of the survey.
- 4.7 The expertise of the Panel members has also been invaluable to PSOW in assisting it with its preparations for the implementation of the new PSOW Bill. These discussions were extremely helpful to the Ombudsman and provided him with an external and objective sounding on these issues.
- 4.8 The Panel also fully participated in a consultation session on the PSOW's new Corporate Plan for 2019–22. The Members considered in detail the views of the PSOW's Service User and Public Body Sounding Boards as well as providing their own views and perspectives on what the PSOW's priorities should be moving forward. Panel members then reviewed the draft Corporate Plan before it was consulted upon publicly and following that consultation, considered the responses received before the Ombudsman finalised the new Corporate Plan.

5. Relationship with the Ombudsman's Office

- 5.1 In view of changes in the membership of Panel over the last year or so the members are a relatively newly established Group. Members have stated that the recent consistency in membership has led to the Panel working effectively as a Group. All Panel members consider that the Panel is working well and the differing perspectives and contributions of all of the members of Panel are valued.
- 5.2 Panel Members are of the view that they have maintained an effective relationship with the Ombudsman and his Management Team. Likewise, Members have stated that their relationship with staff at the Ombudsman's office continues to be very good. Staff are always helpful, supportive and courteous. The Panel all agreed that the PSOW team were easy to work with and that they treated the Panel's input respectfully and professionally. They have found the greater interaction with PSOW's Management Team and staff helpful in their roles.

6. Future Considerations

- 6.1 As the new PSOW Bill is reaching the end stages of the legislative process it is essential that the PSOW implements the new powers effectively as well as continuing to provide a high quality and effective complaints handling service. The Panel's ongoing support and advice during this critical period is essential to the PSOW.
- 6.2 We will continue to review Panel member training and opportunities for the members to engage with staff across the office so that members feel fully briefed to continue to perform their roles effectively and to ensure that the PSOW's Management Team and staff are well informed about the Panel's work.

7. Overall Assessment

- 7.1 The self-assessment review, including assessment forms and individual meetings with the Chair, 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 2018/19 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. There is a benefit to having the same membership on both the Advisory Panel and ARAC, and although this could change in the future, the current arrangement delivers consistency, and a shared understanding of the work of the Ombudsman.
- 7.3 Members continue to provide the right level of challenge and support to the Ombudsman and senior managers as well as bringing insight from their respective backgrounds which is of great value. The forthcoming year will include new and exciting challenges, such as the changing remit of the Ombudsman following the introduction of legislation, which the panel can greatly add value, as well as taking ownership of further developments in relation to governance and the cultural development of PSOW.
