

**Biodiversity and resilience
of ecosystems duty
(section 6 duty)**

**Action Report of Public
Services Ombudsman for Wales**



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1. Introduction

Protecting the environment remains a priority for Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW). Where possible, PSOW works to reduce the impact of the office on the environment and seeks to operate in a sustainable and responsible manner.

This report presents the actions taken by PSOW under biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty, in compliance with the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

PSOW already reports regularly on the actions taken to improve sustainability and reduce any adverse environmental impact of the office. Most recent report on sustainability can be found in the [Ombudsman's Annual Report 2018/19](#).

This report collates and expands on the information on PSOW's performance on sustainability since 2016.

2. Biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty

The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 introduced an enhanced biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty (the section 6 duty) for public authorities in the exercise of functions in relation to Wales.

The section 6 duty requires that public authorities 'seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity so far as consistent with the proper exercise of their functions and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems'.

To comply with the duty public authorities should embed the consideration of biodiversity and ecosystems into their early thinking and business planning, including any policies, plans, programmes and projects, as well as their day to day activities.

PSOW falls within the definition of public authority under the terms of the Act and is required to publish a report on how he complied with the section 6 duty.

Although PSOW is not subject to the full duties of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, he fully supports the vision of the Act to create a more sustainable Wales.

3. Introduction to PSOW

The Ombudsman has three specific roles. The first is to consider complaints about public service providers in Wales; the second is to consider complaints that members of local authorities have broken the Code of Conduct; the third is to set complaints handling standards for public service providers. The Ombudsman is independent of all government bodies and the service provided is free of charge.

PSOW has its main office in Pencoed, near Bridgend. The Ombudsman originally took up the lease for the ground floor of the building in 2005 and has, since then, expanded to occupy parts of the first and second floors to accommodate over 70 staff and visitors in a largely open plan office space.

Electricity is the only energy supply used and this provides lighting and heating/cooling as well as powering normal office equipment.

Building	Constructed	No. of Floors	Total Usable Floor Area (ft ²)	Heating Type
1 Ffordd yr Hen Gae	2004	3	16,460	Air Handling Units

From February 2018, PSOW has also been operating a small office in Bangor.

4. Action Report

The Welsh Government published in 2015 its national biodiversity strategy [Nature Recovery Action Plan for Wales](#) (NRAPW). [Section 6 Reporting Guidance](#) published by the Welsh Government in 2019 suggests that action report on section 6 duty can be connected to NRAPW objectives.

To ensure proportionality, the Guidance identifies several objectives most relevant for authorities such as PSOW - i.e. bodies that own or occupy an office building only and whose functions are not directly connected to biodiversity and/or land management.

These are as follows:

- Engage and support participation and understanding to embed biodiversity throughout decision making at all levels.
- Tackle key pressures on species and habitats
- Put in place a framework of governance and support for delivery

The sections below present PSOW's performance in relation to these objectives.

4.1 Engage and support participation and understanding to embed biodiversity throughout decision making at all levels

Attention to sustainability is integrated into key PSOW policies and strategic plans.

For example:

- PSOW Corporate Plan 2019/20-2021/22 contains a commitment to 'embed the principle of sustainable development in the way we run our business, and to maximise our contribution to achieving the seven Welsh Well-being Goals'. The Plan also identifies KPIs in relation to waste and electricity.
- PSOW Procurement Policy requires that 'all procurement should consider sustainability issues' powering normal office equipment.

PSOW endeavours to ensure that staff have opportunities to contribute to sustainable practice of the office. In 2017/18 staff participated in a workshop on sustainability and identified a number of other measures to improve management of energy usage.

4.2. Tackle key pressures on species and habitats

PSOW's office building is leased, which limits the Ombudsman's ability to make changes to the energy efficiency of the building. Consequently, PSOW's work to ensure and improve sustainability and reduce any adverse impact on the environment has focused on reducing waste, energy use and emissions.

Waste

PSOW recycles all waste paper confidentially and recycles general waste such as plastic, cardboard and tins, along with batteries and toner cartridges.

In 2019, PSOW removed all desk bins to encourage staff to recycle as much waste as possible. New waste points, which include mixed recycling as well as general waste, were added throughout the office.

In April 2016 PSOW took its first steps to becoming a paperless office. Since then a number of key incremental steps have been taken:

- PSOW's electronic case records became the definitive case record, even where paper files existed;
- PSOW staff started to conduct enquiries and initial assessment stages of their work using electronic documents only;
- Letterhead details were incorporated into electronic documents, removing the need to print onto letterhead paper;

- Bodies within the Ombudsman’s jurisdiction were asked for contact to be made electronically where possible;
- For most cases, no paper file is now kept;
- PSOW introduced ‘electronic sub-files’ to share case documents and records with professional advisers electronically instead of producing and sending hard copy documents. In 2019/20, there has been a 40% reduction in the number of sub files being produced in paper format compared to 2018/19.

The UK government aspires to eliminate all avoidable plastic within 25 years. Since 2017/18 PSOW’s sustainability reports also dedicate attention to action to minimise use of avoidable plastic in the office. In 2018/19, PSOW removed bottled water coolers and disposal plastic cups are no longer purchased. Staff and visitors have access to reusable cups and glasses.

The available data suggests that, since 2016/17, PSOW has reduced overall waste as follows:

Waste figures per year (kilograms)

	2016/17*	2017/18*	2018/19
Confidential Waste Recycling	14,300	14,300	8,860
Mixed Recycling	7,800	14,300	2,250
General Waste (including food waste) (estimated)	26,970	26,970	20,000
Total	49,070	55,570	31,110

* Figures for 2016/17 and 2017/18 have been recalculated to convert litres to kg.

Comparisons between 2018/19 and the previous years are difficult. Figures for 2016/17 and 2017/18 reflect the maximum amounts of waste covered by the respective waste collection contracts, which specified waste volumes rather than weights. From 2018/19, new contracts have been in place, which record actual weights of waste collected. This will make future comparisons more meaningful. Figures can also be distorted by periodic destruction of older records, which pre-date PSOW’s paper-light working.

The estimated impact of recycling of paper and confidential waste in 2018/19 was as follows:

Trees saved	Landfill saved (m3)	KwH saved	CO ² saved (kg)	Water saved (L)
150.62	2.05	37,212	5,316	283,520

Since April 2019 PSOW has sent 0% of its general waste to landfill. All general waste is taken to an incineration site. The waste is converted into steam and processed through a cogeneration plant which converts the steam into electricity and heat. The electricity is then fed into the public grid and the residual heat is fed into a heat exchanger to supply local homes with heating or hot water.

Lighting and Energy

A programme to replace existing lighting with LED light bulbs commenced in 2017/18 with 50% upgraded to lamps that use 90% less energy than standard lamps and have a longer life span, resulting in less maintenance and less waste. New LED lighting was fitted across the whole of the ground floor offices and part of the first floor in March 2018, with the remainder of the office lighting also fitted with LED in 2018/19. In parallel, staff and visitors were encouraged to turn off lights and heating/air conditioning when not in use and signage to that effect was placed across the office.

This has resulted in reduction of electricity usage by PSOW by 13% since 2016/17:

Electricity usage (kWh)		
2016/17*	2017/18	2018/19
150.62	2.05	37,212

*This figure represents the actual usage, rather than average usage reported on in Annual Report 2016/17

Emissions

PSOW's office in Pencoed has reasonable public transport links. The railway station at Pencoed (less than one mile away) together with bus services to/from the site, provide public transport options for staff and visitors. PSOW offices are also easily accessed by car from the M4 motorway.

Staff are encouraged to use public transport where suitable for business meetings.

Staff are also encouraged to use public transport for commuting or to travel to work by bike if possible. Showers and bicycle stands are provided at PSOW offices.

Opening a small office in Bangor during 2019/20 helped to accommodate a small number of staff who reside in North Wales and reduce the need for them to travel.

Over the recent years, the number of staff that work at home (WAH) as part of their normal working pattern has increased. This reduces staff commuting mileage and contributes towards a reduction in PSOW's carbon footprint.¹

	2018/19 as at 31/03/2019	2019/20 as at 30/11/2019
Number of staff (part time / full time)	67 (17 PT/50 FT)	72 (21 PT/51 FT)
Number of staff WAH	4	8
WAH days per average week	5	11
Average commuting mileage a day saved	57.5	66.75
Average kgs of CO2 in emissions avoided ²	2991	9694

¹CarbonTrust report '[Homeworking: helping businesses cut costs and reduce their carbon footprint](#)' (2014) explains that 'a significant rebound effect of homeworking is higher home energy consumption, incurring environmental and monetary costs'.

However, the report found that in general, working from home will shrink an employee's carbon footprint if they usually drive more than 4 miles to work in the morning, take a bus for more than 7 miles, or travel by train for 16 miles or more.

²Car carbon footprint was estimated using [CarbonFootprint](#) calculator.

PSOW uses local suppliers are used where possible to help reduce carbon emissions. For example,

Goods / Services	Location
Stationery	Llantrisant
Photocopier maintenance	Swansea
Newspapers	Pencoed
Catering	Brigend

4.3. Put in place a framework of governance and support for delivery

Responsibility for PSOW’s performance on sustainability lies with Chief Operating Officer & Director of Improvement and the Head of Corporate Services. The Head of Corporate Services undertakes internal reviews of PSOW performance on sustainability on a biannual basis. The findings of the process are communicated to PSOW’s Management Team and serve to inform the Ombudsman’s strategic planning as well as the annual sustainability report.

While most of PSOW’s work on sustainability is delivered through internal policies, procedures and actions, on occasions the Ombudsman also seeks to support the environment by partnering with external organizations. For instance, in October 2019 PSOW staff participated in a volunteering day with the Glamorgan Heritage Coast Centre, Dunraven Park. Activities on the day included litter and plastic collection as well as maintenance of Heritage Coast grasslands.

Evaluation by Business in the Community Cymru that brokered the project showed that the experience was valued both by PSOW staff and by the Centre.

- 100% of volunteers who submitted feedback found the experience rewarding

“They were a well organised group of volunteers who worked well despite the adverse weather conditions ... The Ombudsman Wales group managed to achieve a lot in a day”

Louise Bebb – Assistant Ranger.

5. Report and planning

PSOW will continue to report on performance on sustainability as part of the annual report.

In compliance with the requirements under section 6, sub-section (6) of the Environment Act 2016, PSOW will develop a plan to further improve performance on sustainability. This will be incorporated into PSOW's Operational Plan 2020/21.

Some of the actions to be considered under the plan will include:

- further reducing confidential and paper waste;
- increasing the proportion of waste that is recycled (currently 36%);
- improving how PSOW monitors emissions generated by staff business travel and commuting;
- reviewing existing suppliers and procurement arrangements;
- improving staff awareness of ways to reduce their carbon footprint.

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