

Mae'r ymateb yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

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**Response by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales  
to the Community Health Council | Wales Board: Plans and Priorities in 2021-  
2022**

I am pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the Community Health Council Wales Board's consultation on your Plans and Priorities in 2021-2022.

**Our role**

As Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW), I investigate complaints made by members of the public who believe they have suffered hardship or injustice through maladministration or service failure on the part of a body in my jurisdiction, which essentially includes all organisations that deliver public services devolved to Wales. These include:

- local government (both county and community councils)
- the National Health Service (including GPs and dentists)
- registered social landlords (housing associations)
- the Welsh Government, together with its sponsored bodies.

I am also able to consider complaints about privately arranged or funded social care and palliative care services and, in certain specific circumstances, aspects of privately funded healthcare. The 'own initiative' powers I have been granted under the Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Act 2019 (PSOW Act 2019) allow me to investigate where evidence suggests there may be systemic failings, even if service users themselves are not raising complaints. The Act also establishes the Complaints Standards Authority (CSA) to drive improvement in public services by supporting effective complaint handling through model procedures, training and collecting and publishing complaints data.

**General Comments**

The early days of the pandemic prompted a drop in the number of complaints that I received, but it is still too early to say what impact coronavirus will have in the longer term on the complaints service in Wales. However, as delays to treatment already formed a regular theme in my casebook pre-COVID, I suspect that the impact of COVID-19 on waiting times for routine care and treatment is likely to be a key issue as we move towards a post-pandemic period. I would welcome the opportunity to share intelligence between our organisations on the impact COVID-19 has had on complaints handling and health services in Wales.

Since its introduction, the CSA has introduced model complaints standards to local authorities and health boards. Training with local authorities has been very positive and, so far, we have delivered over 70 sessions via MS Teams and data sharing is now in its second year. Training and data sharing with health boards has now started. This will bring opportunities to understand their performance in different ways as well as highlighting the improvements they are making. We would be happy to share the lessons we are learning from the CSA and the data on social services and health services when it is available, with the CHC and the Citizen Voice Body once it is established.

The move to the Citizen Voice Body offers an opportunity for a consistently applied all-Wales approach to advocacy for social care, and we welcome the opportunity to work with the CHC in the transition to the Citizen Voice Body to ensure effective and timely redress for citizens in Wales. In particular, I believe that there is potential for more effective and seamless support in social services advocacy as we are seeing problems with delays for stage 2 complaints particularly as a consequence of the impact of the coronavirus epidemic.

I would also appreciate discussions about establishing an MOU with the new Citizen Voice Body, on a similar basis as we have currently with the CHC Board on sharing general data on who accesses our services and equalities issues. We share some common ground with the CHC Wales Board regarding our desires for a more inclusive and fairer complaints service. Building on our current MOU, I would welcome an opportunity to discuss ways we might work together on issues relating to equality, diversity and inclusion. For example, we may want to undertake joint outreach events for people in difficult or vulnerable positions who need help to make their complaints.

### **Closing remarks**

I trust that you will find my comments useful. Should you wish to discuss any of my points further, please do not hesitate to contact Tanya Nash, my acting Head of Policy ([tanya.nash@ombudsman.wales](mailto:tanya.nash@ombudsman.wales)).



**Nick Bennett**

**Public Services Ombudsman for Wales**

**January 2021**

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