

Ombwdsmon Ombudsman

OMBWDSMON GWASANAETHAU CYHOEDDUS CYMRU
PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES

Briefing

Complaints Standards Authority

Complaints handled by Welsh Local Authorities

April 2021 to March 2022

September 2022



At Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, we have three main aims:

- we handle complaints about public service providers
- we handle complaints about breaches of the Code of Conduct by councillors
- we drive systemic improvement of public services.

We are independent of all government bodies and the service we provide is free of charge.

We can provide copies of this document in accessible formats including Braille, large print or hard copy.

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Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn y Gymraeg.
This document is also available in Welsh.

About this briefing

The Complaints Standards Authority (CSA) was created by the Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) 2019 Act. The CSA works to support effective complaint handling by Public Bodies within our jurisdiction. The CSA achieves this by:

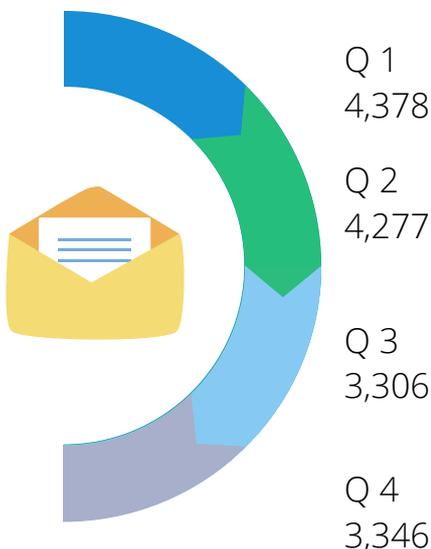
- setting model complaints policies and guidelines
- offering advice and delivering bespoke training packages
- collecting and publishing data on complaints handled by Public Bodies.

After every quarter of the year, the CSA requests complaint handling statistics from Welsh Local Authorities. This briefing paper firstly outlines the main trends in the **complaints handled by Welsh Local Authorities** in the reporting year April 2021 to March 2022. It then provides details of **complaints about Local Authorities made to us**, as well as numbers of **complaints about Local Authorities concluded by us** during the same period. These details indicate how satisfied complainants were with Local Authority responses and how sound the Local Authorities' complaints decisions were. More detailed data is available [on our website](#).

NOTE We report on information on complaints about Local Authorities that are made to us in more detail in our [Annual Report & Accounts](#) and in [Annual Letters](#) that we send to Local Authorities. The Annual Report & Accounts also discusses our work on setting model complaints policies and guidance, and on the provision of complaints handling training.

Our Complaints Standards work commenced with Local authorities but is being extended to include Health Boards and Trusts and larger Housing Associations. We will publish data on these separately in due course.

New complaints received by Local Authorities



In quarter 4, Local Authorities received 3,346 new complaints - **bringing the total for the year to 15,307.**

What this means: Complaint volumes are now higher than before the pandemic.

Complaints closed by Local Authorities



Q 1
3,987 - 78%

In quarter 4, Local Authorities closed 2,905 complaints. 77% of complaints were closed within 20 working days. **Overall, 14,187 complaints were closed in 2021/22 - 76% within 20 working days.**

Q 2
4,137 - 76%

This measure of performance is important to people who use complaints services. However, although it is important that complaints investigations are conducted promptly, we stress that investigations should not be cut short simply to meet a target.

Q 3
3,158 - 73%

Q 4
2,905 - 77%

The statistics for quarter 4 show the lowest number of closures. According to our data, during 2021/22 Local Authorities **received 1,120 more complaints than they closed.**

This suggests that Local Authorities now have larger backlogs than in the previous year.

Uphold rate of complaints closed by Local Authorities



Q 1
50%

In quarter 4, Local Authorities upheld 43% of complaints that they considered - **producing an overall uphold rate of 46% for the year - about the same as previous years.**

Q 2
48%

What this means: The uphold rates have been decreasing during the year. Our data does not show the reasons for this. Whilst upheld complaints show that something went wrong, they also show a willingness to acknowledge that and put things right.

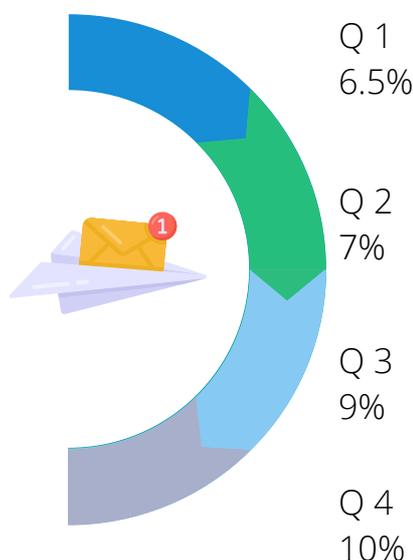
Q 3
39%

Q 4
43%

The lower uphold rate could be a result of improvements made by Local Authorities (for example, the complaints do not hold merit), or reduced willingness to acknowledge failings. The work of the CSA aims to support transparency.

Complaints about Local Authorities made to us

If people are not satisfied with the Local Authority's response to their complaint, they can refer that complaint to us.



In quarter 4, 10% of all complaints considered by Local Authorities were referred to us - bringing the **yearly figure to 8%**

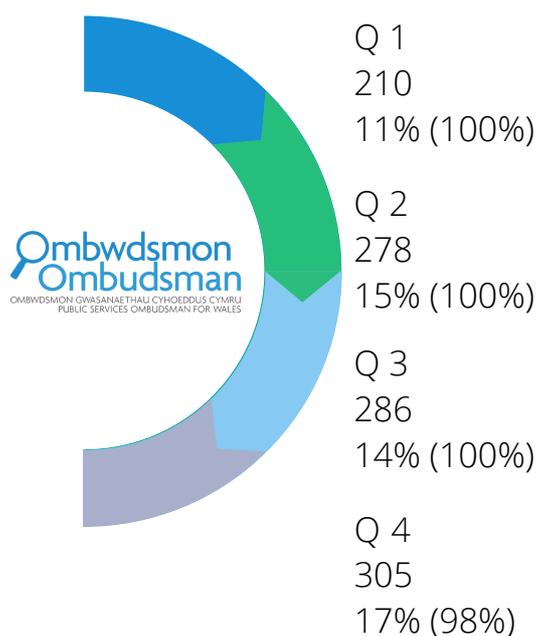
What this means: 8% of people who had their complaints considered by Local Authorities during 2021/22 still wanted to continue their complaint. This proportion has increased during the year.

This trend could be an indicator of how well complaints are being handled by Local Authorities. If so, the increase in the proportion of referrals is not necessarily a positive trend.

However, people are also more likely to refer complaints to us if they are unhappy with the outcome. Therefore, the lower uphold rate by Local Authorities could also lead to more referrals to us.

Trends in our complaints about Local Authorities

The volume of complaints handled, closed and referred by Local Authorities provides some context for our own caseload about those bodies.



In quarter 4, we closed 305 complaints about Local Authorities - making the total **1,092 for 2021/22**.* Some of those complaints would have been referred to us during the quarter; others would have been received before that period.

We **intervened in 17% of the cases in quarter 4**, by recommending Early Resolution or upholding a complaint after an investigation. The vast majority of the remaining cases were out of our jurisdiction, so our intervention rate was **98%** when taking this into account.

What this means: We continue to find opportunities to improve public services in the same proportion of cases.

* This total does not include our closed complaints about Rent Smart Wales.



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