



**Ombwdsmon
Ombudsman**
Cymru · Wales

Communications and Engagement Strategy 2023-2026

May 2023



We can provide a summary of this document in accessible formats, including Braille, large print and Easy Read. To request, please contact us:

Public Services Ombudsman for Wales
1 Ffordd yr Hen Gae
Pencoed
CF35 5LJ

Tel: 0300 790 0203

Email: communications@ombudsman.wales

Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn y Gymraeg.

This document is also available in Welsh.



**Ombwdsmon
Ombudsman**
Cymru • Wales

Communications and Engagement Strategy 2023-2026



Contents

5	Purpose and scope of the Strategy
7	Our stakeholders
8	Key principles
10	Our objectives
11	1. Raise public awareness of the office and its role and powers
14	2. Enhance our contribution to the systemic improvement of public services and local government
16	3. Help to improve our services and impact through the delivery of high quality research and engagement activities
18	4. Maintain and develop effective and accessible content on our digital communications channels
21	5. Establish effective partnerships with gatekeeper organisations
24	Appendices
25	SWOT analysis
26	Stakeholder analysis

Purpose and scope of the Strategy

This Strategy has been developed to support the delivery of our new Strategic Plan 2023-2026 and its mission: to have a positive impact on people and public services in Wales. It contributes to all four aims of the Plan:

Strategic Aim 1: Delivering justice with a positive impact for people and public services.

This Strategy will support us in developing new and accessible resources to better manage the expectations of our complainants. It will also shape our engagement work, through which we gather evidence on how to improve our service.

Strategic Aim 2: Increasing accessibility and inclusion.

We serve the Welsh public and people across Wales need to know about us and understand how we can help them. This Strategy sets out how we will try to make people across Wales aware of us and how we can help them, to ensure equal and equitable access to our service.

Strategic Aim 3: Increasing the impact of our proactive improvement work.

To effectively drive the systemic improvement of public services and standards of conduct in local government in Wales, we must ensure that the bodies in our jurisdiction, councillors and other stakeholders are aware of our role, powers and findings. This Strategy sets out how we will aim to raise that awareness.

Strategic Aim 4: Ensuring that we are a healthy, efficient and accountable organisation.

This Strategy is aligned with our People Strategy, which shapes how we will support the performance and wellbeing of our staff through our internal communications and engagement.

The Strategy will at all times reinforce and be aligned to our brand core:

Our purpose

- We investigate complaints about public services
- We consider complaints about councillors breaching the Code of Conduct
- We drive the systemic improvement of public services and standards of conduct in local government in Wales.

Our ambition

- People of Wales feel that public services treat them fairly and respond when things go wrong
- Welsh public services listen to individuals and use their complaints to learn and improve
- Welsh local government is trusted to deliver the highest standards of conduct
- The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales continues to be an influential and respected voice in public service improvement.

Our mission

- To have a positive impact on people and public services in Wales.

Our tagline

- Delivering justice – driving improvement

Our stakeholders

We have a wide range of potentially relevant stakeholders. As our People Strategy includes internal communications, this Strategy focuses on our external stakeholders only:

- Current and potential service users
- Bodies in our jurisdiction
- Councillors and council staff
- Advice and advocacy bodies
- Parliamentary stakeholders: Members of the Senedd, Members of Parliament and Youth Parliament
- Welsh Government
- Regulators and inspectorates
- Sister organisations
- The media
- Researchers.

Although we know that all these stakeholders are important, we realise that we are not able to communicate and engage with all of them equally. As we outline our objectives, we will explain how we will target particular audiences.

Terminology

In this Strategy,

- **Communications** means our efforts to deliver key messages to our priority stakeholders.
- **Outreach** means our communications activity intended to reach specific stakeholders more proactively and effectively – ideally, where they live or spend time.
- **Engagement** means the two-way communication between us and our stakeholders, including feedback gathering and mutual learning.

Key principles

People-centred

We know that about 30% of people who knew about us in 2022 learned about the office through 'word of mouth'. Especially in a small country such as Wales, we must take advantage of the power of personal connections and professional networks. Satisfied complainants, our professional partners and our staff are key in spreading the word about our work and impact. We must also give members of the public more opportunities to engage with us directly and to craft the crucial personal connections that will increase the visibility of the office.

Impact-oriented

We understand that it is sometimes difficult to capture the impact of our work and that, in many areas, we may only be able to influence change. However, we will be transparent about the intended impact of our communications and engagement work and clear on how we intend to measure it.

Targeted and focused

We do not have the capacity or resources to reach all our stakeholders. We must target and prioritise our work based on our understanding of who currently knows about us and uses our service. A targeted approach also means a focus on pilot campaigns and on locations where we are most likely to find our target communities.

Tailored

We know that to have impact we need to speak to people about things that matter to them. As we target different communities, we will seek to tailor our messages to make sure they remain relevant.

Timely and consistent

We will deliver to our stakeholders current and relevant content at the right time. We will ensure that our communications are sustained over time to achieve impact.

Accessible

We want to be an example of best practice in accessibility. We will actively explore how to make our resources and events more accessible and engaging and will draw on advice from our external partners to improve how we do it. We will adopt and embrace the principles of Plain English / Cymraeg Clir. We will comply with and exceed the requirements placed on us under the Welsh language standards.

Realistic and cost-efficient

We are mindful of the fact that the resources we can commit to our communications work are limited. We will seek to fully benefit from working with key 'gatekeepers' to increase the reach of our communications work.

Sustainable

We know that we must work sustainably and are committed to reducing our carbon footprint. Although we want to undertake more outreach 'face to face', we will carefully consider the benefit of travel to particular events. When producing printed resources, we will look at sustainable and eco-friendly materials.

Our objectives

Our communications and engagement work will be guided by three main objectives and two enabling objectives:

Main objectives

1. Raise public awareness of the office and its role and powers.
2. Enhance our contribution to the systemic improvement of public services and local government.
3. Help to improve our services and impact through the delivery of high quality research and engagement activities.

Enabling objectives

4. Maintain and develop effective and accessible content on our digital communications channels.
5. Establish effective partnerships with gatekeeper organisations.

1. Raise public awareness of the office and its role and powers

How we will know we have made a difference

What we want to see	How we will measure this
An increase in the proportion of people who know about our office, especially among the younger respondent group	National awareness survey (2024 and 2026)
Better representation of our target groups among our complainants	Our equality monitoring

Where we are now

We serve the Welsh public and people across Wales need to know about us and understand how we can help them.

However, the public awareness survey that we undertook in 2022 showed that awareness of the office had dropped to 43%, from 48% in 2020, including among groups such as older people, people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, Welsh speakers and disabled people.

We also know from our equality data that some groups are consistently under-represented among our complainants (details of the profile of our complainants can be found in our Annual Equality Report).

Furthermore, it is not enough that people simply know that we exist – they must also understand how we can help them and what we can and cannot do. There is more work that we need to do to ensure that.

For example, our public awareness survey showed that 83% of the respondents believed incorrectly that we can advocate on their behalf.

In another example, between 30% and 35% of service users that we surveyed in 2022 felt that we did not clearly explain our role and process.

Where we want to be

Our first ambition under this objective is to ensure that diverse communities in Wales know about our service and understand what we can and cannot do.

We understand that not all people we reach may currently have a reason to use our service. Also, as people need

to first complain about any issues directly to the public service provider, we understand that there may be a delay before the communities that we target may approach us. Nevertheless, our second ambition is to see a change in the profile of our complainants, with diverse communities being noticeably better represented.

How we will get there

We know that to realise these ambitions we must undertake much more intense and targeted communications and outreach work. Under this Strategy, we will:

- seek to undertake more targeted face-to-face outreach
- undertake extensive engagement with key 'gatekeepers' (such as advice and advocacy bodies, parliamentary stakeholders and others) to better reach our target communities
- create more accessible resources explaining what we do and communicating those resources better to our key audiences
- encourage satisfied complainants to recommend our service
- encourage our staff to be our 'brand ambassadors' on social media platforms.

We do not have the capacity to reach all communities in equal measure. Under this Strategy, we will therefore focus on specific groups, identified as a priority based on our review of research and equality monitoring.

To ensure maximum impact, we will focus our awareness raising work on events and areas where our target communities are especially well represented. We can identify the areas of particular interest based on the most recent research, including the Census 2021 data. Although we must be mindful of our capacity, we will aim to be visible and active across Wales.

Awareness raising - our target communities

- young people
- people from diverse ethnic and national backgrounds
- disabled people
- Welsh speakers
- people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage

2. Enhance our contribution to the systemic improvement of services and local government

How we will know we have made a difference

What we want to see	How we will measure this
Increase in awareness of our findings among the bodies in our jurisdiction	Our annual survey of bodies in jurisdiction (supported by feedback gathered through our Sounding Boards)
Better uptake of our content in the media	Monitoring of our press presence (based on Google Alerts)

Where we are now

For our work to effectively drive the systemic improvement of public services and local government in Wales, our key stakeholders must know about what we do, so that they, in turn, can use our findings and insights to promote change.

Our survey in 2022 suggested that the bodies in our jurisdiction generally thought that our recommendations had a positive impact. However, the uptake of the survey was very limited and we did not ask if the respondents were aware of our broader work and findings. Furthermore, we have not conducted similar research to capture the views of people involved in complaints to us about the Code of Conduct.

It is also important how we share the relevant information. So far, we have tended to communicate about our work mainly through press releases, amplified through posts on our website and our social media channels. However, we have recently started to issue those press releases to a much broader range of stakeholders and in more engaging formats.

Where we want to be

Overall, we need to expand the range of stakeholders that hear about our work to ensure broader learning.

We also need to continue to explore more engaging formats to retain interest and work more consistently in partnership with other organisations to expand our communication channels.

How we will get there

Under this Strategy, we will:

- expand our mailing list, with a firm process in place to ensure that it remains up to date
- begin to issue a quarterly email newsletter to our audiences, with a round-up of our casework trends, public interest reports, Code decisions and relevant corporate news during the period

Promoting improvement - our audiences

- Bodies in our jurisdiction
- Councillors and council staff
- Advice and advocacy bodies
- Members of the Senedd, Welsh Government and MPs
- Regulators and inspectorates
- Sister organisations
- The media
- Researchers

- tap into the communications channels of our audiences (such as newsletters and events) to distribute our content
- continue to utilise our social media channels to draw attention to our casework findings and proactive improvement work
- implement practical steps to improve how our content is picked up by the press.

3. Help to improve our services and impact through the delivery of high-quality research and engagement activities

How we will know we have made a difference

What we want to see	How we will measure this
Response to the survey of bodies in our jurisdiction increasing	Response rate
New Sounding Board for Code of Conduct launched and established	Output based
New survey of Welsh councillors launched and established	Output based

Where we are now

Our work at PSOW must be informed by relevant, comprehensive and accurate data and feedback from our key stakeholders. This data can help us better target our communications and outreach work, as well as improve our service delivery.

We already undertake extensive relevant research and engagement. Every two years, we commission a national awareness survey of the Welsh public. Every year, we organise a telephone survey of a representative sample of our complainants.

We hold Sounding Boards with bodies in our jurisdiction and advice and

advocacy bodies to gather feedback about on service. In 2022, we held for the first time a survey of bodies in our jurisdiction. Although the uptake has been very limited, the results were a valuable resource.

Engagement - our audiences

- potential service users
- existing service users
- advice and advocacy bodies
- bodies in our jurisdiction
- councillors and Monitoring Officers

Where we want to be

We want to ensure that we continue to gather high quality evidence that supports us to improve. However, we also want to expand the range of this evidence.

For example, we do not undertake more focused or in-depth engagement

with groups of our service users, including people identifying with different equality groups. We also do not currently collect feedback systematically from local councillors or Monitoring Officers.

How we will get there

Under this Strategy, we will:

- maintain the current engagement channels
- work to undertake more focused research and engagement with users of our services identifying with different equality groups
- work to increase the uptake of our survey of bodies in our jurisdiction
- create new channels to engage with the stakeholders involved in our Code of Conduct work.

4. Maintain and develop effective and accessible content and digital communications channels

How we will know we have made a difference

What we want to see	How we will measure this
Better uptake of our digital resources	Google Analytics
Positive feedback from advice and advocacy partners	Feedback gathered through Sounding Boards
Increased engagement with our social media content	Individual platform analytics

Where we are now

It is essential that our content and communications channels are accessible for the communities that we target. This also mean that they need to sometimes be tailored to the needs of specific groups.

Currently, our key digital resource is the website. The current website is strongly focused on directing people to our complaint form and, although it holds much information relevant to various stakeholders, that information is often not easy to find or presented accessibly. Beyond that, we have started to produce some more visual resources to present our work (e.g. Annual Report video).

Our current communications activity centres on the use of our social media platforms: Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook. The former two platforms have been going from strength to strength, although we are mindful that there is more we can do to ensure better engagement with our content. However, our Facebook account is underused and engagement on that platform is poor.

We currently design all our digital publications in house (except for EasyRead versions).

We produce very little printed material. Paper forms and factsheets are available for complainants on demand. We are occasionally asked for large print versions of our resources and we produce those versions on demand.

We rarely publish our content in the press, although we have done so on several occasions (departing Ombudsman key messages; consultation on the Strategic Plan 2023-2026).

Where we want to be

We know that we need to focus more on the content that we produce and the communications channels that we use. Our customer satisfaction research results in 2022 showed a decrease in the proportion of people who agreed that we were accessible (80%, compared to 92% in 2021). The feedback that we gathered

through our annual Sounding Board session confirmed that we need to do more to improve our accessibility, emphasising especially the need for more visual and interactive resources. It also pointed to the need for more printed resources, which may also be required to support more face to face outreach.

How we will get there

Under this Strategy, we will:

- expand our use of social media platforms, including by undertaking a review of our activity and good practice to increase engagement with our content. We will also explore the potential to enter new platforms to reach our target audiences more effectively
- start producing more printed resources and sustainable giveaway items that can be distributed to our stakeholders and shared at events
- reorganise and simplify our website content
- develop new accessible digital formats (such as videos and podcasts) to improve the understanding of our role and processes
- produce translations of key resources into community languages, including British Sign Language (BSL)
- explore new channels for the publication of our work, including community press and stakeholder newsletters.

We have in place a **branding guide**, setting out our core visual identity. Under this Strategy, we will ensure that the branding guide is used consistently internally and we will aim to improve how consistently our brand is used externally as well.

We will also ensure that our content adopts consistent tone of voice. We will:

- use Plain English / Cymraeg Clir unless it cannot be avoided for legal reasons
 - use 'us' and 'we', unless referring to the Ombudsman as the individual post holder (e.g. talking about the appointment of the Ombudsman):
- be professional and clear to instil confidence in our process
 - be empathetic and supportive – recognising that people who contact us are often frustrated with their experiences of complaining.
 - be inclusive – highlighting how we can support and be relevant to diverse communities.
 - highlight our identity as the only Welsh ombudsman office and emphasise our pride in the Welsh culture and language.

5. Develop effective partnerships with gatekeeper organisations

How we will know we have made a difference

What we want to see	How we will measure this
Our staff and service users feel that they have access to quality and up-to-date information on advice and advocacy support available	Output-based - directory in place and regularly updated Staff survey
Advice and advocacy bodies are better informed about our work	Service user survey Uptake of training

Where we are now

We know that our resources to undertake communications and engagement work are limited and that we will not be able to reach all our stakeholders directly.

Over recent years, we have engaged with a number of organisations. They have included Age Cymru, Cytûn, Wales Refugee Council, Ethnic Minorities & Youth Support Team Wales (EYST), Race Equality First, Disability Wales and Learning Disability Wales, Autistic UK, the Chinese in Wales Association, Carers Wales, TGP (Tros Gynnal Plant) Cymru and many others.

As many of these organisations can advise or advocate on behalf of our complainants, through these valuable engagements we have sought to raise awareness of our office and powers. We also sought to gather feedback on possible barriers to our service and scope opportunities for direct outreach.

However, these engagements tended to be 'ad hoc', sporadic and often driven by immediate needs. Often, due to a lack of capacity, we would not sufficiently maintain these established contacts and would miss the opportunities to deepen these partnerships.

Where we want to be

The feedback that we gathered through our annual Sounding Board session and from our staff clearly emphasised that we must do more to engage with advice and advocacy bodies - to raise awareness of our office and our role, powers and

processes, as well as to signpost more effectively the complainants who need advice and advocacy support. We need to also explore the potential of other stakeholders to help us reach our target communities.

How we will get there

Under this Strategy, we will develop a programme of engagement with advice and advocacy bodies, which will include:

- building a directory of these bodies on our website and effectively communicating its content to our staff
- developing a training programme for these bodies to improve their understanding of our service
- organising open days for these bodies in our office.

We will also explore the opportunities to develop pilot partnerships with other gatekeeper organisations that may be in the position to advise our potential complainants. Those may include:

- Local Citizens Advice offices
- Members of the Senedd and Members of Parliament constituency offices
- education workforce.



Appendices



SWOT analysis

Strengths: The Communications Team, which will be responsible for leading on the actions under this Strategy is agile and open to new learning. The management at PSOW supports adopting a much stronger emphasis on communications and outreach work.

We have an emerging network of organisations in the public and third sector that we work with on our projects and use as sounding boards.

We have a very strong evidence base, allowing us to identify our priority stakeholders and areas of action. We also have access to good tools that will allow us to measure the impact of our work.

Weaknesses: Our Communications Team is small and has broad and diverse responsibilities, including Welsh language translations. We must be realistic about our capacity to undertake very extensive outreach.

More broadly, as an organisation, we are currently under pressure do the rising workload. This limits the ability of staff across the organisation to support this Strategy.

Finally, we are conscious that the budget for communications and outreach activities may come under increasing pressure in the difficult economic environment in which we operate. Some communications strategies (such as TV advertising) are currently beyond our reach.

Opportunities: The start of the tenure of the Ombudsman and the launch of our new brand provides a very good opportunity to refresh our networks and resources and relaunch our outreach work.

Threats: With more communications and outreach work comes more reputational risks. We must be vigilant that our content accurately represents our work, and that it complies with our duties under equality and Welsh language legislation.

Stakeholder analysis

All stakeholders

In formulating this strategy, we analysed the types and needs of our stakeholders. The usual tools for stakeholder analysis (for example, based on influence and interest) were not suitable for our purposes, as the nature of influence of our stakeholders was very diverse, and the nature of their interest in our work would also vary. Instead, we opted to identify priority stakeholders based on the focus of our Objectives:

	raising awareness and understanding			keeping informed
	the office	our accessibility support	our role and process	
Service users (potential)	HIGH PRIORITY	HIGH PRIORITY	HIGH PRIORITY	LOW PRIORITY
Service users (current)	N/A	HIGH PRIORITY	HIGH PRIORITY	LOW PRIORITY
Relevant bodies	LOW PRIORITY	LOW PRIORITY	MEDIUM PRIORITY	HIGH PRIORITY
Councillors, council staff	LOW PRIORITY	LOW PRIORITY	MEDIUM PRIORITY	HIGH PRIORITY
Advice and advocacy bodies	HIGH PRIORITY	HIGH PRIORITY	HIGH PRIORITY	HIGH PRIORITY
MSau, Welsh Government, MPs	LOW PRIORITY	LOW PRIORITY	MEDIUM PRIORITY	HIGH PRIORITY
Regulators and inspectorates	LOW PRIORITY	LOW PRIORITY	LOW PRIORITY	HIGH PRIORITY
Sister organisations	LOW PRIORITY	LOW PRIORITY	LOW PRIORITY	MEDIUM PRIORITY
Researchers	LOW PRIORITY	LOW PRIORITY	LOW PRIORITY	MEDIUM PRIORITY
The press	MEDIUM PRIORITY	LOW PRIORITY	MEDIUM PRIORITY	HIGH PRIORITY

Complainants

Our activities under Objective 1 will target service users and advice and advocacy bodies that can help us reach diverse communities.

Being mindful of our capacity to undertake outreach work, we must identify more specific priority groups that we must target as part of this work. We can identify those groups based on:

- our national awareness survey
- the equality profile of our complainants
- the evaluation of needs for potential accessibility support.

Group	Awareness	Representation among our service users	Need for additional support	Overall priority
Men	LOWER THAN AVERAGE	GOOD	NOT LIKELY	LOW
Women	HIGHER THAN AVERAGE	GOOD	SOMEWHAT LIKELY	LOW
	There is some likelihood that women may face more barriers when contacting us. For example, women are more likely than men to be carers and thus may be more time-poor or reliant on our third-party authorisation process.			
People from diverse ethnic backgrounds	MUCH LOWER THAN AVERAGE	TOO LOW	LIKELY	HIGH
	This group is very poorly represented among our complainants and generally not well aware of us. People in this group may have experiences of unfair treatment by public services and be more apprehensive about contacting us. Some people in this group may require additional language support.			
People from diverse national backgrounds*	NO DATA	TOO LOW	LIKELY	HIGH
	This group is very poorly represented among our complainants and we have no data on how well it is aware of us. People in this group may require additional language support.			

* Some of the largest national groups in Wales comprise people from Poland, Ireland, India, Germany and China

People identifying with diverse sexual orientations	NO DATA	GOOD	LIKELY	MEDIUM
	<p>We have no data of awareness of the office by this group. The representation of this group among our complainants is difficult to gauge precisely due to the very high level of 'prefer not to say' survey responses, pointing to issues around trust. However, based on the data we have, this group is well-represented among our complainants. People in this group may have experiences of unfair treatment by public services and so be more apprehensive about contacting us. They may also be more concerned than other groups about confidentiality.</p>			
People identifying as trans	NO DATA	GOOD	LIKELY	MEDIUM
	As above			
Disabled people	HIGHER THAN AVERAGE	GOOD - BUT LITTLE DATA ON SPECIFIC DISABILITY	LIKELY	HIGH
	<p>This group is well-represented among our complainants and appears to be better than average in terms of awareness of the office. However, people in this group are much more likely than others to require our core accessibility services, such as support for people with hearing or sight loss, mobility issues, learning disabilities, mental health issues etc. In addition, our data on our representation of people with different health conditions is limited. For this reason, despite comparatively high awareness and good representation overall, this group must remain a priority audience.</p>			
Older people	HIGHER THAN AVERAGE	TOO LOW	SOMEWHAT LIKELY	MEDIUM
	<p>This group is quite well aware of the office, although we receive few complaints directly from older people (however, others may be complaining on their behalf). People in this group are somewhat more likely to require the support services related to health conditions. They are also somewhat more likely to require information in formats other than digital.</p>			
Younger people	MUCH LOWER THAN AVERAGE	TOO LOW	NOT LIKELY	HIGH
	<p>People under the age of 25 are not very aware of the office and rarely complain to us. Arguably, targeting this group would be most effective in embedding awareness of the office in the Welsh public in the long-term.</p>			

People of diverse religions	NO DATA	GOOD	SOMEWHAT LIKELY	LOW
	We don't have data on the awareness of the office among this group. However, this group is comparatively well-represented among our complainants. It is somewhat likely that people in this group will have experienced unfair treatment by public services and so be more apprehensive about contacting us.			
Welsh speakers	HIGHER THAN AVERAGE	TOO LOW	LIKELY	HIGH
	This group appears to be well aware of the office but we receive very few complaints from Welsh speakers. This said, we only ask about people's main language, not the ability to speak Welsh. It is likely that the proportion of Welsh speakers among our complainants is much higher than our figures suggest. Nevertheless, the uptake of our services in Welsh is very low, with the complexity of the language used possibly presenting a barrier.			
People experiencing socio-economic disadvantage	NO DATA	TOO LOW	HIGH (educational attainment and rural location)	HIGH
	The geographic distribution of our complainants does not suggest that areas of socio-economic deprivation are under-represented, although the level of analysis could fail to capture the representation of specific small-scale localities of particular deprivation. People not in paid work for reasons other than retirement are consistently very well-represented among our complainants (compared to the Welsh average). However, people with a degree, or degree equivalent, are significantly over-represented among our complainants, suggesting that people with lower than degree qualifications, or no qualifications, may face barriers to contacting us. Likewise, the location of our complainants mainly near city and town centres could suggest barriers experienced by people in rural areas.			



Ombwdsmon
Ombudsman
Cymru · Wales

Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

1 Ffordd yr Hen Gae

Pencoed

CF35 5LJ

Tel: 0300 790 0203

Email: ask@ombudsman.wales

Follow us on Twitter: [@OmbudsmanWales](https://twitter.com/OmbudsmanWales)