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Biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems – 2023/24 Report

December 2024



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Foreword

Protecting the environment remains a priority for us. Where possible, we work to reduce the impact of the office on the environment and seek to operate in a sustainable and responsible manner.

This report presents our performance and actions during 2023/24 under biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty, in compliance with the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

It also outlines our progress in the 'areas for improvement' that we identified in 2022/23:

- reviewing the tools available to comprehensively evaluate our carbon footprint and undertake any training required to use them;
- considering the sustainability impact of reducing / adjusting our office space; and
- encouraging staff to consider ways they can reduce their environmental impact.

We continue to operate a hybrid model of working, with many of our staff continuing to work from home and attending the office depending on the need. This is reflected in our sustainability performance this year.

As in the previous year, an important factor shaping our work during 2023/24 has been the continued increase in our casework. That increase placed our staff under considerable pressure and has affected our capacity to undertake some work not directly related to our core business.

Michelle Morris

**Public Services
Ombudsman for Wales**

December 2024

Biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty background

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 so we are required to publish a report on how we have 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, we fully support the vision of the Act to create a more sustainable Wales.



About us

We have three main roles.



We investigate complaints about public services.



We consider complaints about councillors breaching the Code of Conduct.



We drive systemic improvement of public services and standards of conduct in local government in Wales.

We are independent of all government bodies and our service is free of charge.

Our building

We continue to occupy one office in Pencoed, near Bridgend. We originally took up the lease for the ground floor in 2005, which expanded to occupy part of the first and second floors to accommodate over 70 staff and visitors in a largely open plan office space.

Building	Constructed	No. of Floors	Total Usable Floor Area (ft²)	Heating Type
1 Ffordd yr Hen Gae	2004	3	16,460	Air Handling Units

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

We have worked to reduce the office space that we use, in line with our new model of hybrid and agile working. However, for the reporting period (the 2023/24 financial year), the full floor area remained in our financial and operational control and is therefore included in the table above. A new lease, for a reduced floor area, was agreed in April 2024 and this will be reflected in the report on the 2024/25 financial year.

Action report

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

Attention to sustainability is integrated into our key policies and strategic plans. For example:

- At the beginning of April 2023 we launched our new Strategic Plan 2023-2026. Under our new Strategic Aim 4, 'Ensuring that we are a healthy, efficient and accountable organisation', we have committed to 'Play our part in protecting the environment, by further reducing our carbon footprint.'
- For the duration of the Plan, we have identified Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in relation to reducing our greenhouse gas emissions, and actions to reduce our waste and electricity.
- In our Business Plan for 2023/24, we commit to
 - › Maintain energy use and waste despite increased office presence (achieved when our waste and energy does not increase compared to the previous period)
 - › Improve how we measure our carbon footprint, and to establish meaningful baseline figures for Years 2 and 3 (achieved when the measurement process is in place)
- Our Procurement Policy requires that 'all procurement should consider sustainability issues'.

In 2022/23 we committed to reviewing the tools available to comprehensively evaluate our carbon footprint and undertake any training required to use them.

This work continues to progress. We use the UK Government GHG (Green House Gases) conversion factors to help us report on emissions. Part of our emissions are produced by staff working from home and commuting to and from the office. We can now accurately record where staff are working from (home/office) and how often they travel to/from the office. We have reviewed our carbon footprint KPI, and from 2024/25 will also be reporting on the amount of greenhouse gases we produce per FTE.

We continue to encourage staff to consider ways they can reduce their environmental impact.

We have increased the number of people who have use of the Electric Vehicle (EV) charger available at the office. Having this facility available will have contributed to staff decisions to purchase an EV car instead of a standard fuel car.

In March 2024, half of the ground floor office had new air conditioning installed. These new units will be more energy efficient and environmentally friendly which should be reflected in the emissions figures for future years. It is hoped that the remaining units will be upgraded during 2024/25.

The office plants continue to thrive, we are now able to offer staff cuttings to take home to grow them at home. Not only is this good for the environment but also great for staff well-being.

1.2. Tackle key pressures on species and habitats

Our office building is leased, which limits our ability to make changes to the energy efficiency of the building. Because of that, our work to improve sustainability and reduce any adverse impact on the environment has focused on reducing waste, energy use and emissions.

This year we have seen a significant 68% reduction in the waste produced. We recycled 72% of our waste and all other non-recyclable waste avoided landfill. We continue to move towards greater use of digitised materials, to reduce our reliance on paper.

Waste produced on site

Last year we saw an increase in the amount of waste produced, this was due to the downsizing of the office space from January 2023 and staff clearing their desks and cupboards and reducing filing.

Waste Type	2022/23	2023/24
Confidential Waste (recycled) (kg)	16,320	3,285
Mixed Recycling (kg)	572	739
General Waste (kg)	804	1,565
Total Waste	17,696	5,589
Emissions produced (kg CO2e)	376.59	118.94

*conversion factors from UK Government GHG conversion factors for company reporting (0.021281 per unit)

Electricity

Compared to last year, we reduced our energy usage by 23% even though attendance to the office has remained similar to the previous year.

Electricity usage	2022/23	2023/24
Usage (kWh)	74,102	57,405.00
Emissions produced (kg CO ₂ e)	15,334.62	11,887.10

*conversion factors from UK Government GHG conversion factors for company reporting (0.207074 per unit)

Staff working at home

Staff working from home continues to be the preferred location although staff have worked from the office more than in recent years. We have purchased additional laptops for our staff to enable them to work more flexibly. The figures below are based on average time working at home/ commuting to the office.

Emissions	2022/23	2023/24
Working at home	29,452	33,728
Commute to the office	13,191	15,615
Total staff emissions	42,643	49,343

*conversion factors from UK Government GHG conversion factors for company reporting (0.207074 per unit)

In 2022/23, we committed to considering the sustainability impact of reducing / adjusting our office space.

Overall:

- we have seen a reduction of approximately 23% of electricity usage in the office.
- we continue to care for our office plants which we now share cuttings with staff and continue to help absorb CO2 in the office.
- we have seen a reduction in waste and expect our recycling to rise in the future due to the new Workplace recycling regulations being introduced in Wales in April 2024.

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

Responsibility for PSOW's performance on sustainability lies with the 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 an annual basis. The findings of the process are communicated to PSOW's Management Team, and these serve to inform our strategic planning as well as this annual sustainability report.

2. Climate change and climate change risk

Our impact on climate change is limited by the nature of the business, and our ability to control some aspects is limited by our occupation of a rented and shared building on a managed business park. That said, it is important that we understand our impact and take steps to minimise adverse impact and to manage the consequences of climate change. In particular we can:

- consider what we do and how we can have an impact on climate change, even where our impact may be small
- minimise and mitigate waste, energy and emissions
- manage risk associated with climate change.

This report includes our consideration of our impact on climate change, as well as biodiversity, ecosystems and sustainability.

We include appropriate climate change risk in our risk register, for consideration by our Management Team and our Audit & Risk Assurance Committee.

3. Reporting and planning

We continue to monitor and report on performance of sustainability on an annual basis. In compliance with the requirements under section 6, sub-section (6) of the Environment Act 2016, we identify at the same time any areas for improvement. Looking forward, these will include:

- Maintaining energy use and waste despite increased office presence
- Improving how we measure our carbon footprint, to set meaningful baseline for Year 2 and 3 of our Strategic Plan
- Encouraging staff to consider ways they can reduce their environmental impact.

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