

Advisory Panel Review of the Year 2024-2025

1. Background

- 1.1 This paper reviews the effectiveness and work of the Advisory Panel (“the Panel”) during 2024-2025. As with the annual reviews of previous years, it takes account of the views expressed by Panel Members (“Members”) in the self-assessment appraisal forms completed during April 2025.

2. The Role of the Advisory Panel

- 2.1 The Panel is a non-statutory forum whose main role is to provide support and advice to the Ombudsman in providing leadership and good governance of the office of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (“PSOW”). The Members’ varied experience provides the Ombudsman (who is corporation sole) with objective external perspective and advice on the development of policy and practice, strategic direction and scrutiny of the PSOW’s performance.
- 2.2 The Terms of Reference for the Panel were reviewed by the Ombudsman and agreed by the Panel in July 2023 and are set out in Appendix A.

3. Membership

- 3.1 Membership comprises the Ombudsman and a minimum of four and maximum of eight independent external members (who offer specific skills and experience sought by the Ombudsman and may include someone from another ombudsman office). In addition, up to two co-opted members may be included in the membership.
- 3.2 The Ombudsman attends the meetings of the Panel, and the Executive Director Casework & Legal acts as Secretary to the Panel.
- 3.3 The membership of the Panel during the year has been as follows:
- Dr Jane Martin CBE (Chair)
 - Mr Ian Williams to July 2024
 - Mr Mike Usher
 - Ms Carys Evans (Vice Chair until July 2024)
 - Mrs Sue Phelps
 - Ms Nia Roberts (Vice Chair from October 2024)
 - Mrs Bernie Davies
- 3.4 Jane Martin held the position of Chair throughout the year.
- 3.5 Following the conclusion of Ian Williams’ term of office, Felicity Mitchell was appointed to the Advisory Panel from October 2024. Further information about the Members can be found [here](#).

4. Meetings

- 4.1 Members have continued to demonstrate their commitment to the role with all Members having an excellent attendance record in respect of the meetings held over the past year. Full attendance for the year was four meetings and attendance by Members was as follows:

| Panel Member | No. of attendances | Total Possible |
|-------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Ian Williams | 2 | 2 |
| Jane Martin | 3 | 4 |
| Mike Usher | 4 | 4 |
| Carys Evans | 4 | 4 |
| Sue Phelps | 4 | 4 |
| Nia Roberts | 4 | 4 |
| Bernie Davies | 3 | 4 |
| Felicity Mitchell | 2 | 2 |

- 4.2 The Panel sets for itself an annual work programme and Members have received a number of regular reports at each meeting, such as progress monitoring against the targets contained in the Strategic and Operational Plans; and a quarterly Performance Monitoring Report. The 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 Work Programmes are set out at Appendices B and C respectively.
- 4.3 The Panel has continued to work effectively throughout the period of review and has provided the PSOW with helpful scrutiny and challenge. Members of the Committee are invited to assess their training needs annually, and these assessments feed into the development of training plans for the year. Roundtable discussions took place with key office holders of the PSOW and members of the ARAC and Advisory Panel as outlined below.
- 4.4 Key topics considered by the Panel in 2024-2025 were:
- The Panel played a key role in scrutinising the office's response to last year's social media incident involving a now former member of staff. Two additional joint sessions were held with members of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee to consider the office's response to the incident and the impact this had on staff wellbeing.
 - The Panel also received updates on Dr Melissa McCullough's [Independent Review](#) of the office's Code of Conduct processes, procedures and assessment decision which was commissioned as a consequence of the social media incident. It scrutinised the office's approach to implementing the Recommendations and Lessons Learned in Dr McCullough's report. As part of this work, the Panel considered and provided feedback on PSOW's revised Social Media, Staff Standards of Conduct and Declarations of Interests Policies for staff.
 - Members also advised the Ombudsman on the office's response to the [Senedd Finance Committee's Review into the operations, processes and investigations carried out by the PSOW](#), which was also undertaken as a consequence of the social media incident.

- The Panel considered and provided feedback to PSOW's Management Team and Leadership Group on the 2023-24 Staff Survey results and a subsequent piece of work which was undertaken during the first half of the year to gather more detailed feedback and views from staff on working at PSOW. It then scrutinised the Management Team's proposed 'Future Ways of Working at PSOW' which was implemented during the latter half of the year.
- Members considered and provided feedback on the PSOW's draft Annual Report.
- The Panel advised the Ombudsman on the PSOW's draft budget estimate for 2025/26 prior to submission to the Senedd (for approval in October); providing detailed feedback and advice on the Ombudsman's engagement with the Finance Committee.
- Members also considered the office's proposed approach to responding to the Senedd Finance Committee's Post- legislative review of the Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Act 2019.

5. Annual Review

- 5.1 As part of this annual review, Members have assessed their individual performance and that of the Panel as a whole and have considered whether they maintain a clear awareness and understanding of the jurisdiction and operations of the PSOW to provide effective advice and support to the Ombudsman and to assist the Ombudsman on governance arrangements, strategic aims, objectives and targets. The review also assessed whether they felt they had been equipped to provide appropriate scrutiny and challenge to the Ombudsman and to her staff and assessed the working relationships between Members, the Ombudsman's office and other stakeholders, including identifying any difficulties which exist.
- 5.2 One to one annual discussions between the Ombudsman and Chair of the Panel, and between the Chair and individual members of the Panel were undertaken and provided a useful opportunity for feedback on the performance of individual members and the effectiveness of the Panel as a whole.
- 5.3 All members commended the office and the Ombudsman personally on how the office had responded to the social media incident. They welcomed the opportunity they had in supporting and challenging the Ombudsman as corporation sole through a difficult situation which knocked the organisation's confidence and reputation, paying credit to the Ombudsman for the open way she worked with the Panel to work through solutions. They felt that the joint work with ARAC members had been very constructive and extremely useful in guiding the organisation through this difficult time. Members shared aim was to constructively challenge, to reassure elected representatives and the public, and to support staff throughout this difficult period. All members considered that the organisation had come through this episode with greater assurance and resilience.

- 5.4 The members also welcomed the ongoing open and trusted relationship they have with staff who respond openly and constructively to all questions put to them.

6. Future Considerations

- 6.1 The Panel looks forward to providing ongoing support to the office during the forthcoming period of change as a result of changes in the Senior Leadership Team, and to the current Vice Chair of the Panel as she takes up the role of Chair in October 2025.
- 6.2 The opportunity to work jointly with ARAC members on key issues, such as risk appetite and management and data analysis would be welcomed, so that members can bring their wider perspectives to these discussions.

7. Overall Assessment by the Advisory Panel Chair

- 7.1 Members played a critical role in supporting the Ombudsman and the office last year as it responded to the social media incident and rebuilt its reputation for independence and impartiality in relation to its handling of Code of Conduct complaints. Members ongoing open and trusted working relationships with the Ombudsman and her staff ensured that the Panel was able to fulfil its role of providing constructive challenge to the organisation during this critical period and to support the Ombudsman as Corporation Sole.
- 7.2 Dr McCullough's Independent Review report and the Senedd Finance Committee's Inquiry findings provides reassurance, to the public and elected representatives, that they can trust and have confidence in the work of PSOW.
- 7.3 Panel members look forward to providing ongoing support and scrutiny as the office now moves and is able to focus solely on the important service it provides for citizens in Wales.

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| Appendix A - Terms of Reference of the Advisory Panel Appendix B - Work Programme 2024-2025 Appendix C - Work Programme 2025-2026 |
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Advisory Panel - Terms of Reference

Status of the Advisory Panel

The Advisory Panel is a non-statutory forum whose main role is to provide support and advice to the Ombudsman on the leadership and strategic direction of the office of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. The Advisory Panel also brings an external perspective to assist in the development of policy and practice.

The Advisory Panel provides specific advice and support to the Ombudsman on:

- vision, values and purpose;
- strategic direction and planning.

The Advisory Panel is an advisory-only body to the Ombudsman and does not make decisions in its own right.

Membership

Membership will comprise:

- A minimum of four and a maximum of eight independent external members (who offer specific skills and experience sought by the Ombudsman and may include someone from another ombudsman office)
- Up to two co-opted members.

The Chief Legal Adviser and Director of Investigations will act as Secretary to the Panel. Other Management Team members, as decided by the Ombudsman, will attend the Panel's meetings.

The term of office for Independent members will be three years. The Ombudsman has the option to extend this term for three further years.

The meetings will be Chaired by one of the independent external members. A Vice Chair will also be appointed. The Ombudsman will appoint independent members of the Panel to the positions of Chair and Vice Chair on the recommendation of the Advisory Panel. Should the Ombudsman decide not to follow the recommendation of the Advisory Panel the Ombudsman's decision will be recorded in the minutes of the Advisory Panel's meeting.

In order to promote independence, at least one independent member of the Advisory Panel must not also sit on the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.

Role and responsibilities of the Panel

To assist the Ombudsman in establishing:

- the PSOW's strategic direction, aims and objectives and targets;
- key business policies;
- key employment strategies and policies.

To scrutinise and assure:

- the Three Year Strategic Plan and the Annual Operational Plan;
- high level budget allocation;
- the budget estimates submission to the Finance Committee of the Senedd Cymru Welsh Parliament.

To monitor and review:

- operational performance; and delivery;
- effectiveness of employment strategies and policies;
- diversity and equal opportunities, particularly in relation to the Equality Act 2010
- external communications strategies and stakeholder relations.

Rights

The Ombudsman and Advisory Panel may:

- co-opt additional members for a period not exceeding two years to provide specialist skills, knowledge and experience and help the Panel to be representative of the communities the Ombudsman serves.
- seek specialist ad-hoc advice subject to being within budget.

Meetings

Meetings will be held four times a year. A quorum shall be a minimum of three independent members.

Each meeting will also be attended by the Ombudsman (or, exceptionally, a deputy nominated by the Ombudsman).

In the event of the Chair of the Advisory Panel being unable to attend a meeting, the Vice Chair will take the chair or if they are also unable to attend the meeting another independent member will take the chair.

Following approval at the next Panel meeting, minutes of meetings will be published as decided by the Ombudsman.

Declaration of Members Interests Members are required to declare any personal interests in accordance with the PSOW's Policy on [Declaration of Interests](#) by Advisory Panel and Audit & Risk Assurance Committee members.

Sub-committees

It is open to the Advisory Panel to form a Remuneration Committee, or other sub committees, on an ad hoc basis (i.e. when the need arises).

Information Requirements

For each meeting the Advisory Panel will be provided with a report on progress against Strategic/Operational Plan aims and objectives.

As and when appropriate the Panel will also be provided with:

- an annual work programme
- reviews on progress against the Communications & Outreach Strategy
- proposals for any new 'in-year' objectives not originally foreseen when the Strategic/Operational Plans were developed
- draft annual Estimates submission to the Finance Committee of the Senedd Cymru Welsh Parliament
- drafts of proposals for new or revised key business/employment policies
- updates on working relationships with the Senedd Cymru Welsh Parliament
- proposals for any organisational developments
- PSOW's Annual Report
- a periodic review of the Advisory Panel's own effectiveness.

Reporting

- Each Panel meeting shall be recorded in minutes that will be approved at the next meeting.
- The Panel will provide the Ombudsman with an Annual Report on the work it has done during the year, timed to support finalisation of the Ombudsman's Annual Report and Annual Governance Statement.

Note: For the avoidance of any doubt and in accordance with these Terms of Reference the Advisory Panel's role and remit is advisory only. Neither the Panel nor any individual members have any role or remit in relation to operational matters or casework decisions made by the PSOW.

Approved by Management Team on 10 July 2024
Ratified by Advisory Panel on 24 July 2024
Next Review: July 2025

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| <p style="text-align: center;">Public Services Ombudsman for Wales Advisory Panel Work Programme 2024-2025</p> |
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| <p>April 2024</p> |
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Business Plan Actions for 2024-2025
Performance Monitoring Report
Advisory Panel Review of the Year 2023-2024
Discussion Item on Strategic Aim
Communications & Outreach Update
Advisory Panel Members' Training & Development Requirements

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| <p>July 2024</p> |
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Annual Report 2023-2024
Strategic Planning Progress inc. Digital & IT, Outreach, Equality & People Plans Business Plan Update
Performance Monitoring Report
Initial Matters for Consideration for the 2025-2026 Estimates Submission
Update on Own Initiative Investigation
Register of Interests
Review of Advisory Panel Terms of Reference
Discussion Item on Strategic Aim

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| <p>October 2024</p> |
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Estimates Submission to Senedd Cymru
Business Plan Update
Proactive Powers update
Performance Monitoring Report
Discussion Item on Strategic Aim

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| <p>February 2025</p> |
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Update on Estimates Submission to Senedd Cymru (verbal)
Draft response to Senedd Finance Committee
Business Plan Update
Performance Monitoring Report
Communications & Outreach Update
Review of Advisory Panel Work Programme 2025-2026
Discussion Item on Strategic Aim

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| <p style="text-align: center;">Public Services Ombudsman for Wales Advisory Panel Work Programme 2025-2026</p> |
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| <p>April 2025</p> |
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| <p>January 2026</p> |
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