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Annual Report and Accounts 2024-25

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

July 2025



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

This document is also available in Welsh.



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Annual Report and Accounts

of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales
for the year ended 31 March 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Our role

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.

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 principles

We are independent, impartial, fair and open to all who need us.

A word from the Ombudsman

We have now completed the second year of our Strategic Plan 2023-26 'A New Chapter', and it has been another busy year for the office.

Again, we saw an increase in the number of people contacting us about public services. Since 2019-20, the volume of new complaints reaching our office has increased by 43%. To manage this increase, we have intervened early in more cases, avoiding the need for lengthy investigations, while also reducing the time it takes us to complete investigations. We have also dealt with more non-health related complaints, to make sure that our work is balanced across all public services.

We have continued to use our proactive powers to undertake investigations on our own initiative; to set and monitor complaints standards and to accept oral complaints. During the year, we gathered rich evidence of the impact that these powers have had on public services and people of Wales.

Following a social media incident last year involving a former member of our staff, when our independence was questioned, we remain focussed on upholding our reputation. We were very glad to see that an independent review of our investigation of Code of Conduct Complaints found that our decision making was appropriate, fair and free from political bias. In addition, the Senedd's Finance Committee also concluded that we operate with impartiality and fairness and that our response to the incident was appropriate.

Both the Review and the Finance Committee identified recommendations and learning points, all of which we accepted, and details of how we have responded are included in our full Annual Report.

We recognise that this has been a very challenging year for our staff. We are proud to say that, despite this, staff have continued to deliver exceptional services. We were delighted to see evidence that our staff appreciated these steps, with our internal survey results showing improved staff satisfaction.

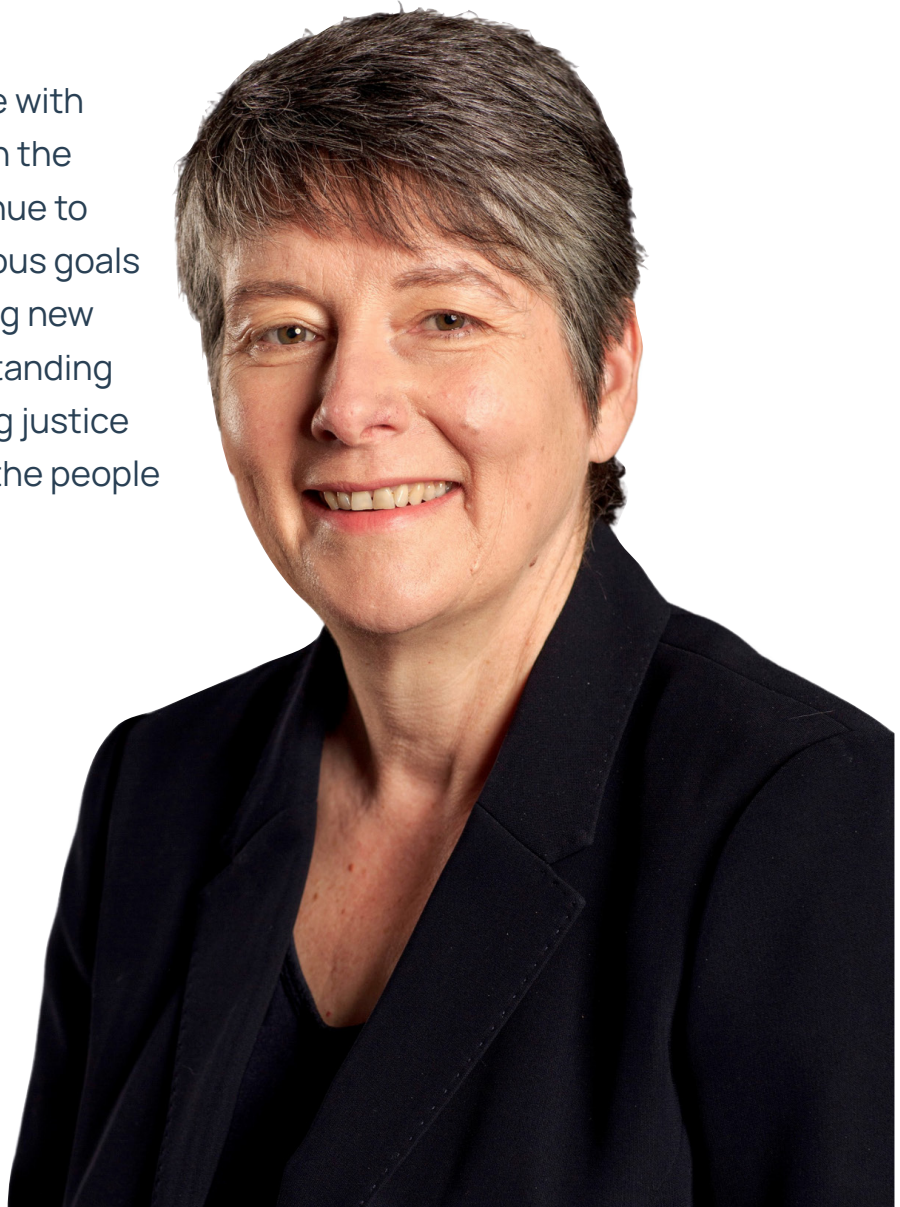
This has been a year of new challenges, but also of new achievements.

We can look to the future with assurance that we are on the right track. We will continue to work towards our ambitious goals during 2025-26, exploring new ways to overcome longstanding challenges and delivering justice and positive change for the people of Wales.

Michelle Morris

Public Services
Ombudsman for Wales

July 2025



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

**We received 10% more
complaints about public
services and the Code of
Conduct.**

**Since 2019-20, the
volume of new complaints
reaching our office has
increased by 43%.**



Complaints about public services



In 2024-25, we received 3,232 new public service complaints, up by 11%.



These included complaints about

- health – 34%
 - housing – 19%
 - complaint handling – 12%
-



If we find that the organisation made a mistake, we will intervene to make sure that it puts things right. This year, we intervened in 18% of complaints that we closed (compared to 20% last year). This was mostly at stage one, through Early Resolution.



When we find that something has gone wrong with public services, we recommend that the body that provided those services puts things right. About 14% of our recommendations this year were about taking steps to make sure that services improve.



Organisations complied with 94% of our recommendations in 2024-25, but a lower proportion was complied with in time with the target date agreed.

Complaints about Code of Conduct



In 2024-25, we received 315 duly made Code of Conduct complaints - 4% less than last year but 36% more than in 2019-20.



Town and community council complaints remain the largest group of our Code of Conduct complaints overall, with a 7% increase in these complaints compared to last year.



The majority (56%) of the complaints that we could investigate were about the promotion of equality and respect – almost the same proportion as last year.



We investigated 49 (about 15%) of Code of Conduct complaints that we closed this year – the same as last year. We referred 15 Code of Conduct cases to either the relevant Standards Committee or the Adjudication Panel for Wales.



In 2024-25, these bodies upheld 85% of the suggested breaches that they considered.

Quality of our decisions and service



We upheld only 6% of requests for review of our decisions, which gives us confidence that our process is sound.

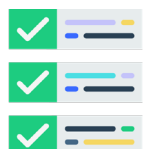


42% of complainants told us this year they were satisfied with our customer service. This figure increased to 95% for those satisfied with the outcome of their complaint. Generally, people tend to be happier with our service if they are happy with the outcome of their complaint.



Public service providers that took part in our survey rated highly most aspects of our service. Overall satisfaction with our most recent service was 8.1/10 – broadly the same as in 2022 and 2023.

Respondents to our further research expressed a positive view of our complaints handling, citing its effectiveness, fairness and timeliness. There was a high level of trust in our decision-making and recommendations. However, we also got some feedback on aspects we could improve.



Of cases that we checked internally through our Service Quality process, 84% resulted in little or no feedback.

Strategic Aim 2: Increasing accessibility and inclusion

We want to make sure that we offer a fair and equal service to all. We had some successes this year, but we will continue to work to improve how accessible we are.

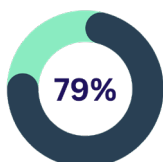




86% of our complainants said that we are easy to contact – a higher proportion than last year.



According to our national awareness research, 48% people in Wales knew about us – about the same as last year.



Confidence in our office was at the highest level ever – at 79%. 82% of people believed we are impartial and 85% felt they could approach us if they needed to.



We accepted just over 160 oral complaints, improving access to our services.



157 people requested additional help and support to use our service.



Our new website is now fully operational and much more accessible.

Despite increased outreach and communications activity, we have struggled to diversify the profile of people who use our service. Also, although our process is fully bilingual, very few people opt to complain to us in Welsh. We will continue to work on these challenges in 2025-26.

Strategic Aim 3: Increasing impact of proactive improvement work



Complaints standards



Currently 54 organisations across Wales operate our model complaints policy.



Our offer of free complaints handling training has remained popular and we provided a further 52 training sessions to public bodies across Wales during the year. This brings the total to 550 training sessions and 10,000 people, since 2020.



97% of the complaints officers that responded to our survey agreed that we provide good quality guidance about complaint handling.



Our national research also suggests that since 2020, more people

- raise complaints about public services,
- say that it was easy to make a complaint and
- say that they were happy with how the complaint was resolved.

Own initiative investigations



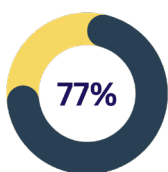
To date, we have closed 10 extended investigations. We currently have 3 extended investigations ongoing.



During the year, we concluded our second wider 'own initiative' investigation, which looked into carers' needs assessments in Wales. We found that

- only 2.8% of people in those council areas who identified as carers had received a needs assessment
- only 1.5% had received a proper support plan following their assessment.

Many carers were also not aware of their rights with regard to assessments and support services that might be available to them.



Of the complaints officers at local councils that responded to our survey this year, 77% agreed that their organisations were moderately or significantly influenced by our own initiative reports.

Our reports and policy work



This year, we issued 8 public interest reports - the same number as last year.



We sometimes issue thematic reports with general recommendations for public bodies, drawing on lessons learned from our casework.

This year, we issued two such reports:



- 'Living in Disrepair' - about housing disrepair and damp and mould complaints.
 - 'Equality Matters' - about inclusion and accessibility across public services.
-



We responded to a review of our Act by the Senedd. Our response presents rich evidence of our impact since we received new powers in 2019.

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

Our staff have continued to deliver exceptional services.





An average of 5.8 days per employee were lost because of sickness, compared to 7.7 days in 2024-25. This is a significant improvement.



Our internal survey results showing improved staff satisfaction. 91% of staff said that we were a great place to work, compared to 74% last year.



A higher proportion of our staff had Welsh language skills.



Our median and mean gender pay gap were negative.



We were able to recycle 84% of waste and sent no waste to landfill.



We saw a 7% reduction in our total CO2 emissions.



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