

Ask for: Communications



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PERSONAL & CONFIDENTIAL

Jan Williams
Swansea Bay University Health Board

By email only

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Dear Jan Williams

Annual Letter 2024-25

Role of PSOW

As you know, our role as the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales is to consider complaints about public services, to investigate alleged breaches of the councillor Code of Conduct, to set standards for complaints handling by public bodies and to drive improvement in complaints handling and learning from complaints. We also undertake investigations into public services on own initiative.

Purpose of letter

Through this letter, we want to give you an update on our work, share key trends in complaints about local government in Wales and highlight any particular issues for your organisation, together with actions I would like your organisation to take.

Complaints about public services

This letter, as always, coincides with the publication of our Annual Report. Again, we saw an increase in the number of people contacting us about public services. Since 2019-20, the volume of new complaints about public services reaching our office has increased by 44%.

We also closed a record number of complaints about public services – 5% more than last year. This year, we intervened (found that something has gone wrong, and recommended how to put things right) in 18% of complaints that we closed. Positively, this year we resolved many more complaints early on. 87% of our interventions this year involved Early Resolution, compared to 70% in 2023-24.

We understand that people who come to us want their complaints resolved as quickly as possible and we are committed to dealing with them in a timely manner.

Overall, we assessed incoming complaints, or intervened with an Early Resolution, within an average of 4 weeks; well within our target of 6 weeks. We have also reduced the time it takes us to complete an average investigation, from 64 weeks in 2023-24, to 53 weeks this year.

During 2024-25, we received 949 complaints about health boards. This is an increase of only 1% since last year, and shows that the rate of increase in health board complaints is still slowing down. Still, we are now receiving 26% more complaints about health boards than in 2019-20.

Predictably, most complaints about health boards concern health services. By far, the most common area of these complaints is clinical treatment in hospital. In addition, about 16% of complaints about health boards related to complaint handling. This was a welcome drop from 18% the year before.

We intervened in 27% of health board complaints that we closed – compared to 31% last year.

In 2024-25, we received 134 complaints about Swansea Bay University Health Board and closed 136 – some complaints were carried over from the previous year. Swansea Bay University Health Board's intervention rate was 24%. You can find detailed information on complaints about your organisation that we handled this year can be found in the appendices.

We made 86 recommendations to your organisation during the year. To ensure that our investigations and reports drive improvement, we follow up compliance with the recommendations agreed with your organisation. In 2024-25, 86 recommendations were due. 64% of the recommendations due was complied with in the timescale agreed. Recommendations and timescales for complying with recommendations are always agreed with the public body concerned before being finalised, and we therefore expect organisations to comply within the timescales agreed.

You may recall that, in January 2024, I issued 3 public reports in the public interest about the management of waiting lists for orthopaedic care at your Health Board. I made several recommendations to the Health Board in each of the reports. As mentioned above, recommendations and timescales for complying with recommendations are always agreed with the public body concerned before being finalised. There were significant delays in achieving compliance with some of the recommendations made within the agreed timescales. However, I am pleased that compliance with our recommendations is now complete.

Supporting improvement of public services

We continued our work on supporting improvement in public services.

During 2024-25, we concluded our second wider own initiative investigation which looked into unpaid carers' needs assessments in Wales. We considered whether 4 local councils – Caerphilly, Ceredigion, Flintshire and Neath Port Talbot - undertook carers' assessments in line with their statutory obligations.

We published the report on this investigation in October 2024. We found that only 2.8% of people in those council areas who identified as carers had received a needs assessment. In addition, 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.

We identified some areas of good practice by the councils we investigated. However, we also made several recommendations including to:

- improve recording practices
- improve how information is shared with carers
- offer staff refresher training on carers' rights
- collaborate better with the healthcare sector.

We invited the other local councils in Wales to make similar improvements.

As we did in the case of our first own initiative investigation, we have been actively monitoring how organisations' have been complying with our recommendations.

We are planning to review compliance with the recommendations and any other impacts of the report in October 2025.

Currently 54 organisations across Wales operate our model complaints policy. This includes all local councils, all health boards and now most housing associations - representing about 85% of the complaints which we receive.

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.

We have continued our work to publish complaints statistics, gathered from public bodies, with data published twice a year. We expect to publish the data on complaints handled by local councils in Wales during 2024-25 in the Autumn. This data allows us to see information with greater context – for example, during 2024-25, 6.13% of complaints made to NHS bodies went on to be referred to us.

Finally, this year we also published 1 thematic report, which included as case studies complaints about health boards:

- 'Equality Matters' (January 2025): a thematic report on inclusion and accessibility across public services.

This report includes general recommendations for public service providers, drawing on lessons learned from our casework.

Action we would like your organisation to take

Further to this letter can I ask that your organisation takes the following actions:

- Present my Annual Letter to the Board at the next available opportunity and notify me of when these meetings will take place.
- Consider the data in this letter, alongside your own data, to understand more about your performance on complaints, including any patterns or trends and your organisation's compliance with recommendations made by my office.
- Provide my office with a copy of the Health Board's Annual Report for 2024-25 on the Duty of Candour and Quality.
- Inform me of the outcome of the Board's considerations and proposed actions on the above matters at your earliest opportunity.

I would like to thank you, and your officers, for your continued openness and engagement with my office.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Morris

Michelle Morris

Public Services Ombudsman

Cc. Abigail Harris, Chief Executive, Swansea Bay University Health Board
Erica Thomas-Howells, PSOW Liaison Officer, Swansea Bay University Health Board

Information Sheet

Appendix A shows the number of complaints received by PSOW for all health boards in 2024-25. These complaints are contextualised by the population of each authority.

Appendix B shows the categorisation of each complaint received, and what proportion of received complaints represents for the Health Board.

Appendix C shows intervention rates for all health boards in 2024-25. An intervention is categorised by either an upheld complaint (either public interest or non-public interest), an early resolution, or a voluntary settlement.

Appendix D shows outcomes of the complaints which PSOW closed for the Health Board in 2024-25. This table shows both the volume, and the proportion that each outcome represents for the Health Board.

Appendix E shows the compliance performance of each health board.

Appendix A – Complaints received (overview)

Health Board	Complaints Received	Population	Received per 1,000 residents
Aneurin Bevan University Health Board	178	595412	0.30
Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board	236	691991	0.34
Cardiff and Vale University Health Board	149	518269	0.29
Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board	102	446514	0.23
Hywel Dda University Health Board	130	388139	0.33
Powys Teaching Health Board	20	134439	0.15
Swansea Bay University Health Board	134	389640	0.34
Welsh Ambulance Services University NHS Trust	24	-	-
Total	973	3164404	0.28

Appendix B – Complaints received (by organisation)

Swansea Bay University Health Board	Complaints Received	% Share
Admissions/discharge and transfer procedures	3	2%
Adult Mental Health	6	4%
Ambulance Services	0	
Appointment procedures (including outpatients)	3	2%
Care Homes	0	
Child and Adolescent Mental Health	2	1%
Clinical treatment in hospital	75	56%
Clinical treatment outside hospital; Dentist	1	1%
Clinical treatment outside hospital; GP	1	1%
Clinical treatment outside hospital; Other	1	1%
Clinical treatment outside hospital; Physiotherapist	1	1%
Complaints Handling	0	
Confidentiality	0	
Continuing care	4	3%
De-Registration	0	
Disclosure of personal information / data loss	0	
Funding	1	1%
Gender Identity Funding	0	
Health	25	19%
Housing	0	
Medical records/standards of record-keeping	0	
Medication > Prescription dispensing	0	
Non-medical services	0	
Nosocomial (Framework)	0	
Other	7	5%
Out of Hours GP care	0	
Patient list issues	3	2%
Poor/No communication or failure to provide information	0	
Prisoner Care	0	
Referral to treatment time	1	1%
Rudeness/inconsiderate behaviour/staff attitude	0	
Various Other	0	
Total	134	

Appendix C – Cases with PSOW intervention (overview)

Health Board	No. of interventions	No. of closures	% of interventions
Aneurin Bevan University Health Board	50	176	28%
Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board	64	227	28%
Cardiff and Vale University Health Board	27	154	18%
Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board	36	104	35%
Hywel Dda University Health Board	43	131	33%
Powys Teaching Health Board	6	25	24%
Swansea Bay University Health Board	33	136	24%
Welsh Ambulance Services University NHS Trust	4	29	14%
Total	263	982	27%

Appendix D – Complaint outcomes (by organisation) (* denotes intervention)

Swansea Bay University Health Board	Complaint Outcomes	% Share
Complaint investigation discontinued (with early resolution at assessment stages)*	0	
Complaint investigation discontinued (without settlement)	0	
Decision not to investigate complaint	53	39%
Early resolution*	25	18%
Matter out of jurisdiction	21	15%
Non-public interest report issued: complaint not upheld	8	6%
Non-public interest report issued: complaint upheld*	7	5%
Non-public interest report issued: complaint upheld with early resolution at assessment stage*	1	1%
Premature	21	15%
Public interest report issued: complaint upheld*	0	
Public Interest report issued: complaint upheld with early resolution at assessment stage*	0	
Special Interest Report*	0	
Voluntary settlement*	0	
Total	136	

Appendix E – Compliance performance comparison

Health Board	Number of recommendations made on complaints closed in 2024-25	Number of recommendations falling due in 2024-25	% of recommendations, complied with in line with agreed target date
Aneurin Bevan University Health Board	136	160	66%
Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board	196	210	65%
Cardiff and Vale University Health Board	72	96	70%
Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board	101	118	42%
Hywel Dda University Health Board	137	140	89%
Powys Teaching Health Board	16	12	33%
Swansea Bay University Health Board	86	86	64%
Welsh Ambulance Services University NHS Trust	18	6	33%