

Cabinet/Board/Elected Members

Complaints Standards Authority

'The goal of good complaints processes is not to deliver fewer complaints. The goal is to maintain relationships, protect reputations, and improve services for all users.'

CSA

The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales was granted new powers under the 2019 Act which allowed them to act as the Complaints Standards Authority for Wales.

They issued model complaint handling procedures to Public Bodies, which then become statutory guidance.

Section 38 of the Act places certain responsibilities on Public Bodies including:

- A common definition of what a complaint is
- No more than 2 stages in a complaints policy
- No longer than 10 working days for stage 1 complaints, 20 working day target for stage 2
- Responsibility to use complaints data to inform service delivery
- Requirement to report to senior management at least twice a year



CSA

What is the definition of complaint?

- An expression of dissatisfaction or concern
- Written or spoken or made by any other communication method
- Made by one or more members of the public (someone in receipt of, or denied a service)
- About a public service providers action, lack of action, or the standard of the service provided
- Something which requires a response



ROLE

While it is not appropriate for the Board/Cabinet to be involved in the investigation of individual complaints, they should ensure that the Policy is in place and adopted correctly.

Instead, reports should be provided to the Board/Cabinet at least twice a year on the number and type of complaints received, their outcomes and any remedial action taken as a consequence.

The Board/Cabinet should lead the organisation's approach in welcoming complaints. This should encourage a positive culture towards complaints where staff see the value of investigations. Complaints Handling should be viewed as an opportunity to learn and improve services for all service users rather than apportioning blame. The Board/Cabinet should promote the importance of learning lessons and taking accountability for the findings.

Organisations may see an increase in the number of complaints being recorded under this definition, and the Board/Cabinet should see that this is not viewed negatively. Instead, services recording the appropriate amounts of complaints should be encouraged.



REPORTS

It is for the Board/Cabinet to determine how frequently it should receive such reports, however, this should be at least twice a year. Organisations with such arrangements in place may, in addition, want to include the consideration of complaints reports to be included within the remit of a scrutiny or similar type of committee.

These reports should set out what changes have been made as a result of complaints information and, following monitoring of their implementation, what results have been received.

The Board/Cabinet should scrutinise these reports, ensuring that there is demonstration of complaints contributing to improved service delivery, asking for specific examples/details of lessons learned, what changed as a result and what the impact has been.

The board should ensure that the insights gained from complaints are impactful by engaging in frequent discussions with relevant senior managers to evaluate the performance related to complaints.

QUESTIONS

When evaluating complaints performance, the Board/Cabinet may want to use the following questions as a guideline:

- What were the main issues?
- What were the lessons learned?
- What changes have been implemented?
- What difference have we seen?
- How are we communicating these changes to our customers?

As well as scrutinising complaints handling, the Board/Cabinet may also want to explore complaints performance:

- How many complaints have we received?
- How many have we closed?
- How does this reflect per 1000 customers/contract holders?
- How many complaints were upheld?
- What is the average handling time?

You may also want to consider complaints made to PSOW:

- How many complaints have been referred to the Ombudsman?
- How many have been investigated?
- What were the outcomes?
- Have we complied with recommendations?

CONSIDER

Are you satisfied that you have the appropriate number of complaints for the services you deliver?

You might want to think about the number of interactions your services have with your customers such as the number of calls made to your helpdesk per week, or the amount of patient interactions each day.

Do these equate to the number of complaints you think you should receive under the definition?

Who is complaining?

We want services to improve for everyone, not just those with the means to complain. We know gathering this data isn't always straightforward, but consideration should be given to the following:

- Do you know the demographic of your contract holders, or the profile of the area you provide your service in?
- Is this reflected proportionately to those who are complaining?
- Are all service areas recording complaints?

While it's appropriate to focus on the service areas with the most amount of complaints, you might want to consider areas that are not reporting complaints. There may be good practice to share with colleagues or potential training requirements.

TRAINING

The Model Complaints Handling Guidance suggests that Board/Cabinet should receive training on complaints handling. Initial training is provided for free by the Complaints Standards Authority. However, if members are not able to attend training, their website has a host of resources that can be used: <https://www.ombudsman.wales/complaints-standards-authority/>.

The service provider should also plan for ongoing training, guidance and support for all staff. Complaints Training should form part of the induction for all new starters but also there should be continuous learning throughout the organisation. You may want to consider e-learning or annual tests.

DATA

The Board/Cabinet are key to ensuring that learning takes place from complaints trends and data. They should ensure that the organisation is accountable for making changes as a result of complaint investigations.

Under The Act, PSOW publish data from Public Bodies on their website: <https://www.ombudsman.wales/published-statistics/>.

The reports show complaints information for public bodies, and PSOW, during the financial year and are updated biannually. The data is made public to provide transparency about public sector complaints, and those dealt with by public bodies in the Ombudsman's jurisdiction. The organisation should be aware of this data and can use the information available to monitor performance.