



Draft Strategic Plan 2026-2029

of Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

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This document is also available in Welsh.

Contents

The evidence shaping our Plan	3
Capturing and communicating impact.....	3
Managing increasing demand.....	3
Expanding our improvement work.....	4
Expanding our work on accessibility, outreach and engagement	4
Making better use of our data	4
Taking advantage of new technology and AI	5
Maximising efficiency, agility and resilience of our people, resources, and processes.....	5
Our ambition	6
Our principles	6
Our Strategic Aims and objectives	7
Strategic Aim 1: Deliver justice with positive impact for people of Wales	7
Strategic Aim 2: Influence positive change in public services and high standards of conduct in local government.....	8
Strategic Aim 3: Strengthen access and impact for those who need our service the most.....	9
Strategic Aim 4: Ensure that we are a resilient, agile and accountable organisation.....	10
Next steps.....	12

The evidence shaping our Plan

The scope of our new Plan was shaped by rich evidence and insights from across the organisation. Our staff, Management Team and Advisory Panel played a central role. This evidence helped us identify the key issues we feel we need to address or strengthen. We outline some of the key areas below.

Capturing and communicating impact

Capturing impact is essential for any accountable and well governed public body: it demonstrates whether our work delivers tangible improvements for individuals, public services and democratic standards, and it strengthens transparency, learning and public confidence. Yet measuring impact - particularly systemic change across public services or shifts in standards of conduct in local government - remains challenging. Such outcomes develop over time, can be influenced by multiple factors, and are often difficult to evidence in a consistent way. Nevertheless, as we mark twenty years of service, our focus is firmly on strengthening how we capture and evidence that impact, ensuring we deliver a stronger service with clearer, measurable benefits for the people of Wales.

Managing increasing demand

The key ongoing challenge is the relentless growth in demand for our service. Since we launched our last Strategic Plan, the volume of new complaints about public services has risen sharply. We now receive almost three times as many as we did in our first year of operation two decades ago. We have always welcomed complaints, as they show that people know about our office and understand their right to raise concerns. But this sustained increase also brings significant pressures - on our staff, our ability to maintain excellent service, and our resources at a time when public finances remain under strain. Much of the work under our new Plan will focus on how we can manage this increasing demand across all aspects of what we do and how we work.

Expanding our improvement work

In 2019, the Senedd entrusted us with new powers to strengthen our ability to drive improvement across public services. Since then, a significant part of the Welsh public sector has come under our Complaints Standards framework, with thousands of people benefiting from our training on good complaint handling. We have also completed a number of own-initiative investigations, enabling us to look into issues without requiring an individual complaint. In 2025, the Senedd's post legislative review of our Act concluded that we have used these new powers to take a more proactive, accessible and inclusive approach. However, we agree with the Senedd that there is further potential to expand this work, so that we can deliver better outcomes for even more people and tackle some of the factors that drive an increase in complaints volumes across Wales.

Expanding our work on accessibility, outreach and engagement

We are the Welsh Public Services Ombudsman, and our service is open to all who need it. Yet we know that some groups do not use our service as often as expected. More broadly, there are areas of public service where people do not complain enough, whether to us or to service providers. The process should be straightforward but too often, it is not - and vulnerable groups in particular may struggle to have their voices heard. Under our new Strategic Plan, we will reaffirm our commitment to ensuring seamless access to our service, while using our full suite of powers and working closely with partners to better identify and address issues affecting people on the ground.

Making better use of our data

How we use our data, and how we can use it better, emerged as a strong and consistent theme in the evidence we gathered. As a public sector organisation, we must handle data securely and in line with all legal and ethical standards. But we also need to make full use of the information we hold to work smarter. Better analysis of our data can help us manage our caseload more efficiently, target our complaints standards, own-initiative and outreach work where it adds most value, and strengthen our business processes - all for the benefit of the people of Wales.

Taking advantage of new technology and AI

For better or worse, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is here to stay. It is already reshaping public service delivery, including in areas as sensitive as clinical care. Like many other public sector organisations, we can see how this technology can help us deliver better service and better outcomes for the people of Wales. Under our new Strategic Plan, we want to maximise these opportunities. However, we will never compromise on our integrity and people-centred approach. We are committed to using AI and other innovative technologies responsibly, ethically, and transparently.

Maximising efficiency, agility and resilience of our people, resources, and processes.

For us to be able to deliver stronger service and better impact, we must always build on strong foundations. This includes first and foremost our people. Our staff tell us that PSOW is a good place to work. Our challenge is how to maintain this level of job satisfaction and support wellbeing of our dedicated and committed staff in the face of ever-growing demand for our service. Under our new Strategic Plan, we want to work smarter and in a more agile and responsive way equipping our people to be able to adjust to change while also streamlining our key processes. As always, we will do so without compromising our commitment to good governance, accountability and transparency.

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**. We are funded by and accountable to Senedd Cymru.

We are **impartial and fair**. We do not take sides. We examine the facts before us and reach our own, unbiased conclusions.

We are **open to all who need us**. Our service is free to use, and we are committed to ensuring seamless access, for all.

We are **people centred**. We understand that people come to us at difficult moments, and that complaints processes can feel daunting. Whatever the outcome, everyone who interacts with us should feel respected, heard and understood.

Our Strategic Aims and objectives

Our Aims and objectives focus on what we are committing to achieve and our intended impact. We will continue with our commitments but also introduce new ambitions, responding to ongoing and new challenges and opportunities.

Strategic Aim 1: Deliver justice with positive impact for people of Wales

We deliver an empathetic, proportionate and efficient service that leaves people feeling heard and understood. Our recommendations are reasonable, consistent and effective.

The impact we want to see

- It takes us less time to consider complaints.
- People who complain to us agree that we considered the complaint thoroughly and that we clearly explained our decision.
- Organisations comply with our recommendations within the targeted time.

Our objectives

We will

- invest in developing digital technology solutions to facilitate access for service providers and complainants.
- explore new, agile ways of working to ensure that we consider complaints quickly and effectively, with ongoing commitment to resolve complaints earlier.
- further enhance the quality of our service delivery, to ensure that whatever the outcome, more of our complainants feel heard and understood.
- review our recommendations, ensuring better consistency and impact for complainants and service providers.
- continue to strengthen how we monitor and ensure compliance with our recommendations.

- help people understand better how our final decisions are made.
- continue to fairly and effectively apply our public interest test, referring the most serious complaints about Code of Conduct.

Strategic Aim 2: Influence positive change in public services and high standards of conduct in local government

We systematically improve public services through our Complaints Standards work, own initiative investigations and public interest and thematic reports. We identify good practice and lessons learnt, communicating these effectively to contribute to improvement of public services. We support high standards of conduct amongst councillors.

The impact we want to see

- Organisations that access our complaint handling resources agree that they support positive change in their organisation.
- People who complain to public service providers in Wales say that the process was easy.
- Case studies and other research demonstrate positive impact of our improvement work on public services.
- Through our Code of Conduct referrals, we promote the highest standards in public life.

Our objectives

We will

- expand and bring more organisations under our Complaints Standards.
- deliver more own initiative (OI) investigations, streamlining the process and strengthening engagement with key stakeholders.
- introduce new ways to systematically capture impact and learning from our Complaints Standards work, OI investigations, public interest and thematic reports and Code of Conduct investigations.

- review and develop our approach to the media to strengthen coverage and impact of our work.
- develop new resources to raise awareness of local government members of their duties and our role in relation to the Code of Conduct.

Strategic Aim 3: Strengthen access and impact for those who need our service the most

We continue to improve access to our service. We promote our service to those who may need it the most, including through key gatekeeper organisations. We ensure that we focus our efforts on issues affecting most vulnerable groups.

The impact we want to see

- People who use our service find it easy to contact us.
- Awareness of our office, including among our target groups, is increasing.
- We have more capacity to accept oral complaints, including from users of diverse languages.
- More people use Welsh when interacting with us.
- New members of the Senedd and their staff know about us and understand how we work, helping them to better support their constituents.
- Third sector organisations have good awareness of our role and work and have meaningful input into our own initiative investigation process.

Our objectives

We will

- continue to ensure seamless access for anyone who needs our service and improve service user experience.
- consider opportunities (including new technologies) to streamline and improve our oral complaints process and do more to promote this service, including to users of languages other than Welsh and English.

- review our approach to our outreach and engagement work with particular emphasis on reaching and engaging with specific hard-to-reach groups.
- take further steps to strengthen the use of our service and resources in Welsh.
- expand targeted engagement and further develop training resources to help advice and advocacy organisations and constituency offices support complainants and better manage expectations.
- secure consistent and reliable insights from third sector organisations, to gather better information on issues affecting users of public services, with special focus on vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups.
- work with the Senedd, the Welsh Government and other partners, to scope the feasibility of widening our remit to include complaints about schools.

Strategic Aim 4: Ensure that we are a resilient, agile and accountable organisation

We maintain and improve efficient and effective use of our staff, financial, and IT resources, and ensure good governance, accountability and transparency.

The impact we want to see

- Our workforce remains skilled, resilient, engaged and inclusive.
- We embrace adaptive and agile ways of working.
- We continue to demonstrate the highest standards of sound and responsible financial management.
- We maximise opportunities arising from data, innovative technology, digital tools and AI.
- Our systems continue to be secure and resilient.

Our objectives

We will

- equip our people to develop agility and resilience to achieve continued high performance.
- streamline our processes and adjust how we work to quickly respond to challenges and opportunities.
- remain committed to good governance, financial accountability and manage our resources with the highest standards of economy, efficiency, and effectiveness.
- make data more central to our operations and use it to innovate, improve efficiency, and inform every decision.
- adopt technology thoughtfully to support and improve our services, with every decision centered on creating better experiences for our service users.
- embed security and resilience into every layer of our technology, ensuring dependable services that protect people and data.
- continue to play our part in protecting the environment, consolidating our measures to reduce our carbon footprint.

Next steps

The Strategic Plan is a high-level document. However, we will produce an annual Business Plan for each year of the Strategic Plan.

The Business Plan will include detailed actions to deliver our Strategic Aims - for example, which groups we intend to target in our outreach work.

The Business Plan will also include the Key Performance Indicators (KPI) that we will use to monitor our performance and impact in areas that we can control or influence. Although the Business Plan will be an internal document, to ensure transparency and accountability we will publish our priorities and KPIs for each year.

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