

Meeting of:	Standards Committee
Date of Meeting:	Thursday, 24 November 2022
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	All Scrutiny Committees
Report Title:	Public Services Ombudsman for Wales Draft Strategic Plan 2023-2026
Purpose of Report:	To apprise the Committee of the Strategic Plan published by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.
Report Owner:	Debbie Marles, Monitoring Officer/ Head of Legal and Democratic Services
Responsible Officer:	Karen Bowen, Principal Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	This report does not involve any consultation with other parties
Policy Framework:	This is a matter for the Standards Committee
<p>Executive Summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appendix 1 to this report details the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales Draft Strategic Plan for 2023- 2026. The Plan provides details of the role, ambition, principles and strategic aims of the Ombudsman’s Office. • The four strategic aims of the Ombudsman’s Office being <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) Delivering justice with a positive impact for people and public services (2) Increasing accessibility and inclusion (3) Expanding its proactive improvement work (4) Ensuring a healthy, efficient and accountable organisation. 	

Recommendation

1. That the Standards Committee notes the content of the report and forwards any comments or observations to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

Reason for Recommendation

1. To apprise Members of the Committee and forward any comments as appropriate.

1. Background

1.1 The purpose of the Ombudsman's office is:

- To investigate complaints about public bodies
- To recognise and share good practice so that public bodies can learn the lessons from our investigations and put right any systemic weaknesses identified, leading to continued improvement in the standards of public services in Wales
- To investigate complaints against local authorities members who have broken the code of conduct
- To build confidence in Welsh local government by promoting high standards in public life
- To put things right where it can.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1** Attached at Appendix 1 to the report for the Committees information is a copy of the Public Services' Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) Draft Strategic Plan 2023-2026 which sets out the Ombudsman's ambition for its service over the next three years. The Plan refers to the role of the Ombudsman's Office, its ambition, principles and strategic aims.
- 2.2** Members will note from the Plan that the Ombudsman's caseload increased during 2021/22 and is anticipating the number of complaints is likely to rise going forward. The challenge for the Ombudsman's Office being to manage that caseload in a way that does not compromise its service and delivers better outcomes for people who have suffered injustice.
- 2.3** The Plan attached at Appendix 1 provides details of the four strategic aims together with various actions under each aim emphasising how the Office will innovate and explore new ways of working to deliver its ambitions.
- 2.4** Members will note that the Ombudsman's Office is committed to working collaboratively and to be ambitious and transparent in demonstrating the influence and impact of its work.
- 2.5** The Strategy also confirms that the Ombudsman's Office will produce an Annual Business Plan each year of the Strategic Plan which will include detailed actions

to deliver the strategic aims and identify key performance indicators to monitor performance.

- 2.6 Further reports relating to the Business Plan when received will be presented to the Standards Committee for its consideration, as appropriate.
- 2.7 Committee is requested to note the contents of this report and the Strategic Plan attached as Appendix 1 and forward any comments or observations to the PSOW.
- 2.8 The PSOW deadline for comments is noted as 22nd November, 2022 however the following a request by the Monitoring Officer the PSOW has agreed that this deadline be extended in order that any comments from this Standards Committee meeting can be forwarded.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

- 3.1 The Standards Committee shall have the following roles and functions:
 - (a) promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by Councillors, Co-Opted Members and Church and Parent Governor representatives;
 - (b) assisting Councillors, Co-Opted Members and Church and Parent Governor representatives to observe the Members' Code of Conduct;
 - (c) advising the Council on the adoption or revision of the Members' Code of Conduct;
 - (d) monitoring the operation of the Members' Code of Conduct;
 - (e) advising, training or arranging to train Councillors, Co-Opted Members and Church and Parent Governor representatives on matters relating to the Members' Code of Conduct;
 - (f) granting dispensations to Councillors, Co-Opted Members and Church and Parent Governor representatives from requirements relating to interests set out in the Members' Code of Conduct;
 - (g) dealing with any reports from a case tribunal or interim case tribunal, and any report from the Monitoring Officer on any matters referred to that officer by the Public Services Ombudsman;
 - (h) the exercise of (a) to (g) above in relation to the Community Councils wholly or mainly in its area and the members of those Community Councils;
 - (i) overview of complaints handling and Ombudsman investigations.

4. Climate Change and Nature Implications

- 4.1 None as a result of this report.

5. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

5.1 None as a result of this report.

Employment

5.2 None as a result of this report.

Legal (Including Equalities)

5.3 None as a result of this report.

6. Background Papers

N/A

Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

Strategic Plan 2023-2026

Michelle's foreword

I am proud to publish this Strategic Plan, setting out my ambition for the office over the next three years.

In developing this Plan, I have been acutely aware of the challenges facing the public sector, and this office in the new, post-pandemic Wales.

As the Ombudsman, I have the duty and the privilege to deliver justice for individuals who feel that public services or their elected local representatives have let them down.

Our caseload has increased during 2021/22 and we expect the number of complaints to continue to rise. More complaints means more opportunities to deliver justice when things have gone wrong. However, with limited resources and capacity, it can also affect the quality of our service and limit our ability to drive more systemic improvement. Our challenge is how to manage that caseload in a way that does not compromise our service and delivers best outcomes for people who have suffered injustice.

We are confident that the standard of our decision making is very good. However, we know that our service users want us to listen more and be easier to reach. Many may also feel vulnerable or at a disadvantage when complaining against a service provider. Although we must remain independent and impartial, and we cannot always deliver the outcome that people seek from us, we know that a supportive approach and empathy must be at the heart of our service.

We are equipped with powerful tools to improve public services in Wales, especially for people who face barriers in complaining. We can initiate our own investigations on significant issues. We can also set complaint handling standards for bodies in our jurisdiction and monitor how they implement these standards. Over the coming years, we need to expand how we use these tools to have even more impact.

This Plan identifies four Strategic Aims to address these and other challenges and opportunities. If we are to have a meaningful and lasting impact in the new post-pandemic world, business as usual is not an option. Like all public sector

organisations in Wales, we must adjust how we operate – adopt new ways of working and try new solutions.

We need to wisely invest in our staff, offering the right support and reaping the benefits of agile working. We must also continue to improve the security and resilience of our systems, and contribute to tackling the climate crisis. Finally, we need to always deliver value for money in a difficult economic situation and so be ambitious but also realistic about the resources and capacity available to us.

We cannot do this alone. This Plan draws on the valued feedback we have had from our staff, service users and public bodies. We will continue to engage closely with them to work towards our ambition for the office over the next three years.

I am grateful to all who contributed to developing this Plan and look with hope and excitement to the future, as we embark on this new chapter in our service to the people of Wales.

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.

Our Strategic Aims

The challenges that we face are different to those in the past - and we need to tackle them differently. Our actions under the Strategic Aims emphasise how together with our staff we will innovate and explore new ways of working to deliver our ambitions.

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

We deliver an efficient, empathetic and proportionate service that supports justice and improves public services.

What will we do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore new digital tools and processes to help us manage our increasing complaints caseload and sustain performance. • Further enhance the quality of our service delivery, in line with our Service Standards and service user feedback. • Improve how we manage the expectations of our complainants throughout the complaint handling process, emphasising our duty to deliver a responsive and proportionate service. • Ensure our recommendations to public bodies are delivered and provide redress to individuals when things go wrong. • Ensure that our recommendations deliver systemic improvement of public services in Wales.
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Strategic Aim 2: Increasing accessibility and inclusion

People across Wales are aware of our office, understand how we can help them and our service is relevant and accessible.

What will we do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a new and more accessible website, structured around the needs of our service users. • Transform our relationship with advice and advocacy bodies supporting our service users through a programme of outreach and engagement.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch an ambitious communications and outreach campaign, supported by more accessible and visual information resources, to reach those communities that are least likely to complain to us. • Improve the quality of our communication, including by embedding the use of Plain English / Cymraeg Clir across the organisation.
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Strategic Aim 3: Expanding our proactive improvement work

We contribute to improvement in public services, through complaints standards work, wider learning from complaints and own initiative investigations and supporting high standards of conduct amongst councillors.

What will we do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance the impact of our Complaints Standards work by bringing more public bodies under our model complaints policy, developing training on good complaint handling and highlighting learning from the data we collect to improve public services. • Launch more own initiative investigations, including with a focus on improving public services for service users under-represented among our complainants. • Support good standards of conduct by councillors in local government in Wales, and explore new ways and resources through which we can do so.
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Strategic Aim 4: Ensuring that we are a healthy, efficient and accountable organisation

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

What will we do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve our business processes and Casework Management Systems, to help our staff work more efficiently and effectively. • Develop our new model of agile working, engaging with staff to review our office needs and improve internal communications. • Develop and implement our People Strategy, to ensure that we maintain high performance and that staff feel valued and supported.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement a refreshed ICT Strategy to sustain and improve our ICT systems and ensure that we can continue to provide an efficient, secure and resilient service. • Play our part in protecting the environment, by further reducing our carbon footprint.
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Making a difference

In all that we do, we aim to achieve three things: deliver justice for individuals, improve public services and support high standards of conduct in local government. We know that we are not the only organisation pursuing these goals, but we will work collaboratively and be ambitious and transparent in demonstrating the influence and impact of our work.

	How will we know we have made a difference?	How will we measure this?
Strategic Aim 1: Delivering justice with a positive impact for people and public services	<p>People are more satisfied with our service.</p> <p>People better understand our role and we receive fewer complaints that we cannot consider.</p> <p>We are able to make decisions more quickly in a larger proportion of cases.</p> <p>Our service users and public bodies in our jurisdiction think that our recommendations had positive impact.</p>	<p>Feedback from our service users, public bodies in our jurisdiction and our staff</p> <p>Analysis of our complaint handling performance using KPIs</p>
Strategic Aim 2: Increasing accessibility and inclusion	<p>Awareness of the office is increasing.</p> <p>More people engage with our website and resources and give us positive feedback about them.</p>	<p>National awareness surveys</p> <p>Website use analytics</p> <p>Feedback from our service users and</p>

	<p>Advice and advocacy bodies value the relationship with us and positively assess working with us.</p> <p>The equality profile of people who complain to us is more diverse.</p>	<p>advice and advocacy bodies</p> <p>Equality and diversity monitoring</p>
<p>Strategic Aim 3: Expanding our proactive improvement work</p>	<p>People who use public services in Wales have better experiences of engaging with complaint processes.</p> <p>Public bodies follow our Complaints Standards guidance and model process.</p> <p>Our own initiative investigations make meaningful recommendations to address injustice and we have evidence of tangible improvements to public services as a result.</p>	<p>National survey</p> <p>Analysis of our complaints trends</p> <p>Analysis of our compliance evidence</p> <p>Feedback from bodies in our jurisdiction</p> <p>Feedback from service users and advocacy groups</p>
<p>Strategic Aim 4: Ensuring that we are a healthy, efficient and accountable organisation</p>	<p>We are an agile workplace, using our facilities efficiently and offering the right support to our staff.</p> <p>Our staff are motivated and high-performing.</p> <p>The profile of our workforce is more diverse, better reflecting the communities that we serve.</p> <p>Our systems are available, effective and secure.</p> <p>We reduce our carbon footprint.</p>	<p>Feedback from our staff</p> <p>Equality and diversity monitoring</p> <p>Internal and external audits</p> <p>Carbon footprint monitoring</p>

Next steps

We will produce an annual Business Plan for each year of this Strategic Plan. The Business Plan will include detailed actions to deliver our Strategic Aims and Key Performance Indicators to monitor our performance and measure how we have made a difference.