

Our ref: NB/MM

Ask for: Nick Bennett

Date: 08 March 2022

John Griffiths MS
Chair of Local Government and
Housing Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay Cardiff
CF99 1SN

By email only:
SeneddHousing@senedd.wales

Dear John

I indicated in the past that I am keen to share with the Committee more information about trends arising in our casework, as well as in complaint handling practices of Local Authorities. I believe that such information may not only support the Committee in scrutinising our work but can also point to some areas of performance of bodies in our jurisdiction that could merit the Committee's attention.

Accordingly, I am pleased to attach a briefing paper 'Complaints handled by Welsh Local Authorities - October to December 2021'. This report presents the statistics on Local Authority complaints collected by our Complaints Standards team for quarter 3 of reporting year 2021/22.

I trust that you will find this publication useful. However, please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like to discuss this publication in further detail.

Yours sincerely



Nick Bennett
Ombudsman

CC - Peredur Owen Griffiths MS, Chair of the Finance Committee

Briefing paper

Complaints Standards Authority

Complaints handled by Welsh Local Authorities -
October to December 2021

March 2022



At Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, we have three main aims:

- we handle complaints about public service providers
- we handle complaints about breaches of the Code of Conduct by elected members of Local Authorities
- we drive systemic improvement of public services.

We are independent of all government bodies and the service we provide is free of charge.

Queries about this publication can be directed to:

communications@ombudsman.wales

We can provide copies of this document in accessible formats including Braille, large print or hard copy. To request, please contact us using the details below.

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About this briefing paper

The Complaints Standards Authority (CSA) was created by the Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) 2019 Act.

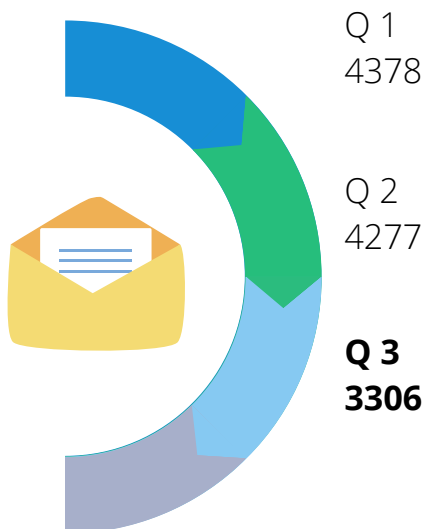
The CSA's task is to support effective complaint handling by Public Bodies within our jurisdiction. The CSA achieves this by:

- setting model complaints policies and guidelines
- offering advice and delivering bespoke training packages
- collecting and publishing data on complaints handled by Public Bodies

After every quarter of the year, the CSA requests complaint handling statistics from Welsh Local Authorities and Health Boards. This briefing paper outlines the main trends in the complaints handled by Welsh Local Authorities in quarter 3 of this reporting year (April 2021 to March 2022). More detailed data is available [on our website](#). We will publish statistics for complaints handled by other bodies in our jurisdiction in due course.

DISCLAIMER We believe that some Local Authorities continue to under-report their complaints. The CSA is working continuously with Local Authorities and other bodies in our jurisdiction to improve the quality of the data available. As this work continues, caution is advised when interpreting the statistics available.

New complaints received by Local Authorities



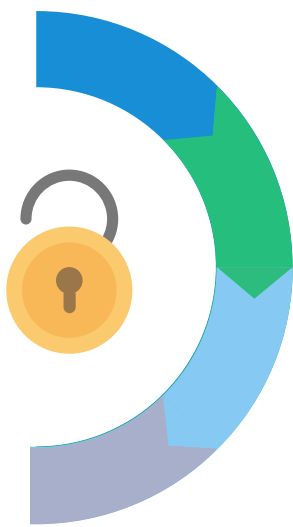
In quarter 3, Local Authorities received **3306 new complaints** - 4.2 complaints for every 100 residents in Wales.

What this means: Complaint volumes are now higher than before the pandemic. However, the volumes of new complaints dropped noticeably in the third quarter.

Fewer complaints does not necessarily mean better performance. Low numbers of complaints recorded could also point to problems with accessibility.

That said, quarter 3 tends to be the quietest for Local Authority complaints, which could be related to the Christmas period.

Complaints closed by Local Authorities



Q 1
3987 - 78%

In quarter 3, Local Authorities **closed 3158 complaints**. 73% of complaints were closed within 20 working days.

Q 2
4137 - 76%

What this means: During the year, it has been taking increasingly longer for Local Authorities to close complaints within 20 working days.

Q 3
3158 - 73%

This measure of performance is important to people who use complaints services. However, although it is important that complaints investigations are conducted promptly, we stress that investigations should not be cut short simply to meet a target.

The statistics for quarter 3 could be attributed to the difficulties experienced by all public bodies during the winter. However, our data also signals that the growing backlog of complaints may be related to the increased timescales observed.

Uphold rate of complaints closed by Local Authorities



Q 1
50%

In quarter 3, Local Authorities **upheld 39% of complaints** that they considered.

Q 2
48%

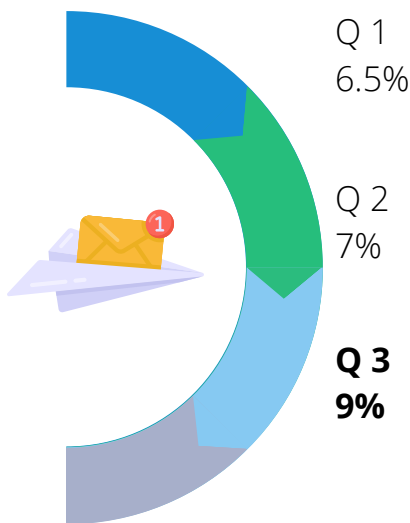
What this means: The proportion of complaints upheld has been decreasing during the year.

Q 3
39%

High uphold rates are not necessarily a sign of poor performance. They can indicate willingness to improve service delivery and admit when something has gone wrong.

The lower uphold rate could be a result of improvements made by Local Authorities (for example, the complaints do not hold merit). However, it could also derive from higher level of defensiveness about performance.

Complaints referred by Local Authorities to us



In quarter 3, **Local Authorities referred to us 9% of the complaints** that they considered.

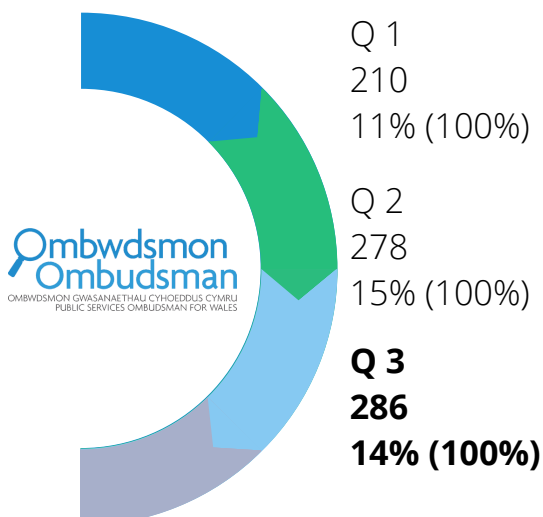
What this means: 9% of people who had their complaints considered by LAs still wanted to continue their complaint. This proportion has been increasing during the year.

This trend could be an indicator of how well complaints are being handled by Local Authorities. If so, the increase in the proportion of referrals is not necessarily a positive trend.

However, people are also more likely to refer complaints to us if they are unhappy with the outcome. Therefore, the lower uphold rate by Local Authorities could also lead to more referrals to us.

Trends in our complaints about Local Authorities

The volume of complaints handled, closed and referred by Local Authorities provides some context for our own caseload about those bodies.



In quarter 3, **we closed 298 complaints about Local Authorities**. Some of those complaints would have been referred to the office during the quarter; others would have been received before that period.

We **intervened in 14% of those cases**, by recommending Early Resolution or upholding a complaint after an investigation. Since the remaining cases were outside our jurisdiction, the actual intervention rate in cases that we could consider was 100%.

What this means: We continue to find opportunities to improve public services in the same proportion of cases. This leads us to believe that there are further improvement required in public service delivery.



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