



Ask for: Michelle Morris



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Chair of Finance Committee

Dear Peredur

**Response to Finance Committee's 'Annual Scrutiny of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales' - November 2025**

I refer to the Committee's recent report on its '**Annual Scrutiny of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.**' I welcome the Committee's report and its recommendations, and I write to respond to the report and to each recommendation. All the recommendations are accepted.

**Recommendation 1.** The Committee recommends the Ombudsman provides information on plans she has to alleviate workload pressures and to outline the support that is available to staff and for this to inform future resource planning.

Response: Agreed - although we are experiencing significant caseload pressures, we have alleviated workload pressures on individual staff members by setting a maximum number of cases which any individual caseworker handles at any one time whilst also taking into account the complexity of cases. This ensures that workloads across the casework teams are maintained at a reasonable level. Cases which are queued pending allocation to an individual caseworker are being managed by dedicated staff, which has ensured that cases are being progressed even when they are held in queues. These measures will inform future resource planning.

**Recommendation 2.** The Committee recommends that the Ombudsman prioritises the monitoring of staff wellbeing in light of increased workloads and recent staff movements.

Response: Agreed – staff wellbeing continues to be a priority, we have a range of methods in place to safeguard wellbeing; regular 1:1 meetings with staff, informal discussions, stress risk assessments, wellbeing events both online and in person

organised by our dedicated Wellbeing Working Group and also the availability of flexible working and deployment of resource to alleviate pressures raised by staff at any particular time. Communication is key, we encourage our staff to talk to us when they feel they need support and we are responsive in taking action. We also use Wellbeing Passports for any adjustments to be formalised, even when short term. We have a Leadership Charter in place which describes the supportive leadership behaviours that build a culture where wellbeing is safeguarded. All of these measures ensure we keep abreast of staff wellbeing and address any issues as they emerge. We are both proactive and responsive as an employer. We use our annual staff survey to 'check in' and to ensure that we know how staff are feeling and whether there are any further actions we need to take as an employer to support well-being.

**Recommendation 3.** The Committee recommends that the impact of the revised senior leadership structure be evaluated over time, with findings published in an Annual Report to ensure that the new arrangements deliver operational efficiency and strategic oversight.

Response: Agreed, during the first 2 quarters of 2026, we will be undertaking a review of our structure, to include all senior leadership arrangements. As we discussed with the Committee, this "reset" is intended to strengthen our resilience to deal with increasing cases and to ensure the right level of efficiency and strategic oversight to deal with organisational change, risk management and the delivery of core business.

**Recommendation 4.** The Committee recommends that the Ombudsman undertakes an anonymised profiling exercise to identify trends in language preference of complainants and publishes the responses in the next Annual Report with the findings to inform future service improvements.

Response: Agreed, as discussed with the Committee we intend to undertake an exercise to inform future service improvements and encourage a better uptake of our services through the medium of Welsh and from those whose first language is not English.

**Recommendation 5.** The Committee recommends that the Ombudsman improves the efficiency of processes for developing plans to undertake a greater number of own initiative investigations.

Response: Agreed, work is already underway to develop a plan for how PSOW will use Own Initiative Powers in 2026/27. This will take into account the lessons learnt from previous investigations and from the Committee's recent Review of the Act. Our aim is to increase the use of this power, to streamline the consultation process and to ensure the right level of engagement with public bodies and the third sector to inform the effective and impactful use of the powers.

**Recommendation 6.** The Committee recommends that the Ombudsman continues to quantify and publish data in the Annual Report on the costs of powers associated with the Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Act 2019 to aid future scrutiny.

Response: Agreed – we will continue to continue to publish information on the costs of powers associated with the Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Act 2019 in future Annual Reports.

**Recommendation 7.** The Committee recommends that the Ombudsman informs the Committee of any proposed or confirmed changes to the April 2026 pay award and confirms whether it intends to submit a supplementary budget to cover any related increases in costs that cannot be absorbed within its current budget.

Response: Agreed – we will keep the Committee informed on the settlement of the April 2026 pay award as the year progresses. However, as the Committee will be aware, if the actual pay award is higher than we have provided for, we will have a funding shortfall that we may need to fund through the Supplementary Budget process.

**Recommendation 8.** The Committee recommends the Ombudsman provides an update on how many staff it recruits as a result of these savings and outlines their impact within a future Annual Report.

Response: Agreed – the work to plan the ‘reset’ of the organisation is already underway and decisions will be made on how savings will be invested in new posts to support our increase in cases and our ambitions as set out in the new Strategic Plan 2026-2029.

**Recommendation 9.** The Committee recommends that the Ombudsman provides further information on how the queuing process for public services complaints in greater detail and the impact that changes in the staffing structure will have on this process.

Response: Agreed – cases are being queued at key stages in our process:

- **new complaints on receipt**, pending allocation to an individual caseworker in either our Intake or Assessment Team, and
- **at ‘investigation start’ stage**, pending allocation to an individual caseworker in our Investigation Team.

**New complaints on receipt** – cases are held in our ‘new complaints’ queue when they are received, with 2 dedicated members of staff managing work on these cases to ensure they are progressed even when they are held in the queue, for example, by asking for any information needed to assess the complaint from the complainant and/or the public body, providing advice and guidance to colleagues on casefiles so that cases are dealt with as efficiently as possible when they are allocated to a caseworker and allocating cases which appear to be suitable for detailed investigation direct to the Investigation Team. When individual caseworkers have capacity (subject to the maximum caseloads level set), they

are allocated a fresh case. Despite a 12% increase in cases as at the end of December, the number of cases held in this queue has reduced since the Committee's meeting in October, as a result of the measures we have put in place.

**At 'Investigation start' stage** – cases which are allocated direct to the Investigation team queue are then assessed in detail by a dedicated member of staff to decide whether they are either suitable for resolution or detailed investigation. Depending on the outcome of this assessment, either a resolution will be agreed with the public body or the 'Heads of Complaint' which are suitable for investigation are drafted and discussed with the complainant. Letters confirming that an investigation has commenced are then issued to the complainant and to the public body, with a request that the public body provides relevant information and its response to the complaint within 4 weeks. This ensures that cases held in our 'investigation queue' are progressed before being allocated to an individual caseworker. Cases are allocated to an individual caseworker by the time the public body has responded to our request for information. Cases in this queue are also reducing as a result of the measures we have put in place.

I will also take this opportunity to respond to a recommendation made by the Committee in its '**Scrutiny of the First Supplementary Budget 2025-26**' report published in July 2025.

**Recommendation 8.** The Committee recommends that the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales:

- provide a breakdown of how the additional funding provided through the First Supplementary Budget 2025-26 covers costs relating to the increase in employer National Insurance Contributions within their organisations, including whether this covers staff employed by third parties as well as permanent staff costs, once details of the UK Government's main supply estimates are known;
- confirm that any surplus funding allocated for this purpose is returned to the Welsh Consolidated Fund.

Response: I can confirm that the full amount of additional funding provided to meet increased costs in employer National Insurance contributions has been used for this purpose. We do not employ staff through third parties, so no funding has been used here. There has been a small in-year surplus from the additional funding (< £5,000) that we have not needed, as a result of staff turnover, and I can confirm that this will be returned to the Welsh Consolidated Fund as part of our year-end underspend.

Yours sincerely

**Michelle Morris**

Ombwdsmon Gwasanaethau Cyhoeddus | Public Services Ombudsman