

# **Biodiversity, Resilience of Ecosystems and Sustainability - Annual Report 2021/22**

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December 2022



We can provide a summary of this document in accessible formats, including Braille, large print and Easy Read. To request, please contact us:

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**Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn y Gymraeg.**

**This document is also available in Welsh.**



OMBWDSMON GWASANAETHAU CYHOEDDUS CYMRU  
PUBLIC SERVICES OMBUDSMAN FOR WALES

# **Biodiversity, Resilience of Ecosystems and Sustainability - Annual Report 2021/22**



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## Foreword

Protecting the environment remains our priority. Where possible, we work to reduce the impact of the office on the environment and seek to operate in a sustainable and responsible manner.

This report presents our performance and actions during 2021/22 under biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty, in compliance with the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

It also outlines our progress in the areas for improvement that we identified in 2020/21:

- Review our methodology for measuring our greenhouse gas emissions to include emission from home working
- Work to limit increases in office waste generated and energy used, as we return to some office-based working
- Review the impact of Covid on our supplier and procurement arrangements
- Encourage staff to consider ways they can reduce their environmental impact
- Work with the Wellbeing Group to consider volunteer activities that support the environment
- Consider using 'plant-a-tree' schemes such as search engine extensions with our browsers.

Following the gradual easing of the COVID-19 restrictions, we have been introducing the new model of hybrid working. Although most of our staff continue to work mainly from home, we have been able to use our office space much more extensively than in 2020/21. This is reflected in our sustainability performance this year.

An important factor shaping our work during 2021/22 has been the very significant increase in our casework.



That increase placed our staff under considerable pressure and has affected our capacity to undertake some work not directly related to our core business.

Finally, we have recently discussed, with our Audit & Risk Assurance Committee, the National Audit Office publication: Climate change risk: a good practice guide for Audit and Risk Assurance Committees. Following that discussion, we will include in future reports details of all measures we have taken to minimise our impact on climate change, and we will consider whether and how we might be able to become a 'net zero' organisation. In terms of climate change risk itself, we will also ensure this risk is appropriately reflected within our risk register.

**Michelle Morris**  
Public Services Ombudsman for  
Wales

December 2022



## About us

We serve the people of Wales in 3 different ways.

Our first role is to handle complaints about maladministration, service failure, or failure to provide a service by most public service providers in Wales, such as:



Local Government



NHS (including GPs and dentists)



Registered Social Landlords



Welsh Government and its sponsored bodies

More information on our process for handling complaints about public bodies in Wales can be found [on our website](#) (also in [Easy Read](#)).

Our second role is to consider complaints that elected members of local authorities have breached their Codes of Conduct, which set out the recognised principles of behaviour that members should follow in public life. In this role, we can consider complaints about:



County and County Borough Councils



Community Councils



Fire Authorities



National Park Authorities

More information on our process for handling complaints about a local authority member's conduct can be found [on our website](#) (also in [Easy Read](#)).

Our third role is to drive systemic improvement of public services. Traditionally, we have done this mainly by publicising our findings, for example in public interest and thematic reports, annual letters to bodies in our jurisdiction and casebooks. However, in 2019 we were given new powers to drive systemic improvement. We can now undertake investigations on our own initiative, even when we have not received a complaint. We can also set complaints standards for public bodies in Wales and monitor their performance in complaint handling.

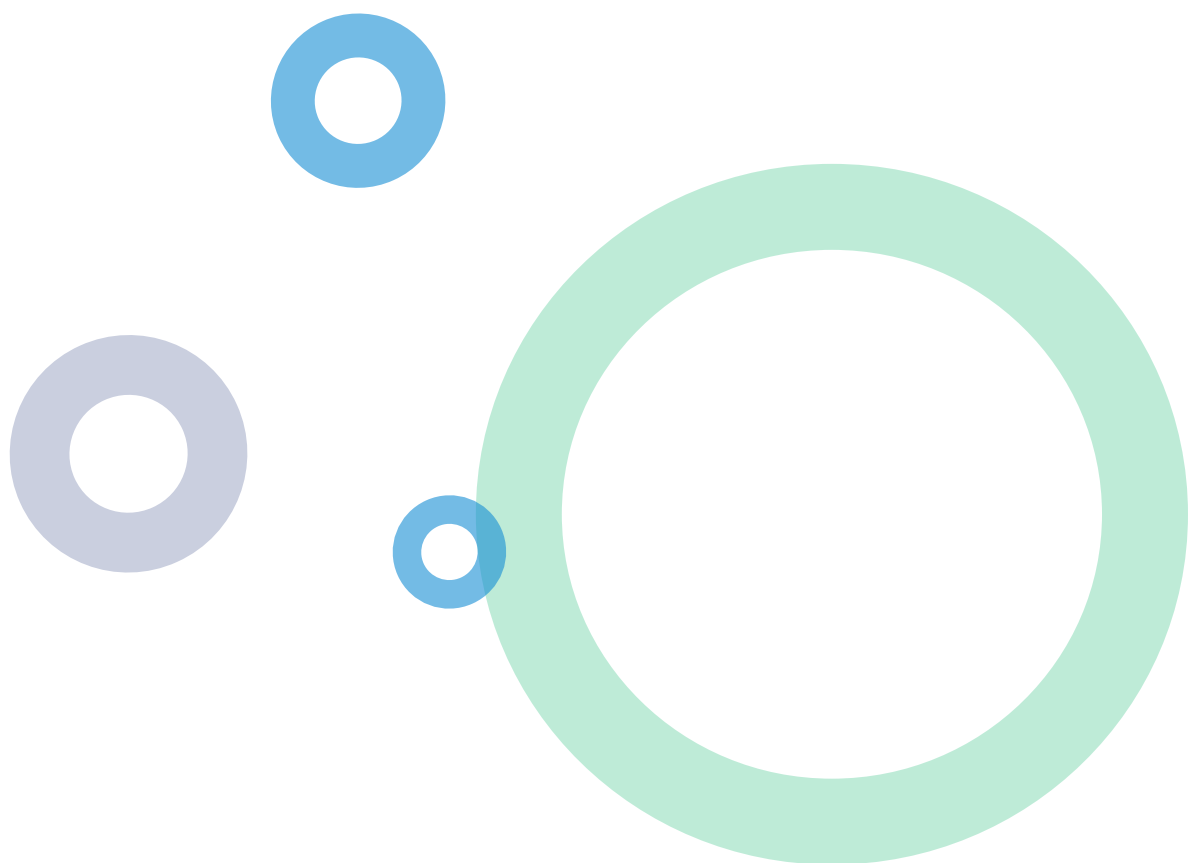


## Our building

We continue to occupy one office in Pencoed, near Bridgend. We originally took up the lease for the ground floor in 2005 and have, since then, expanded to occupy part of the first and second floors to accommodate over 70 staff and visitors in a largely open plan office space.

Electricity is the only energy supply used and this provides lighting and heating/cooling as well as powering normal office equipment. We are currently considering reducing our office space, in line with our new model of hybrid and agile working.

Building	Constructed	No. of Floors	Total Usable Floor Area (ft <sup>2</sup> )	Heating Type
1 Ffordd yr Hen Gae	2004	3	16,460	Air Handling Units



# Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty background

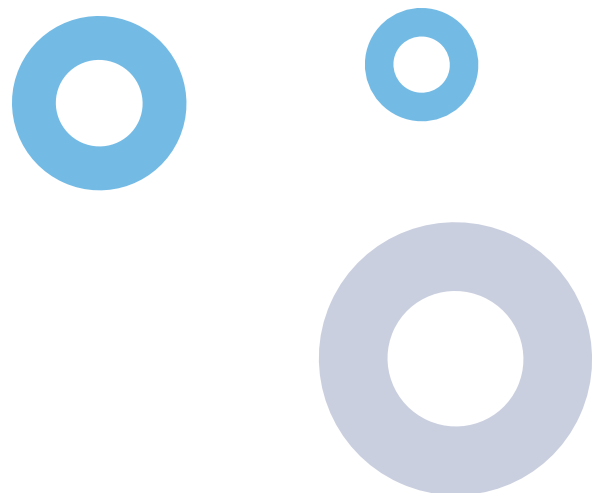
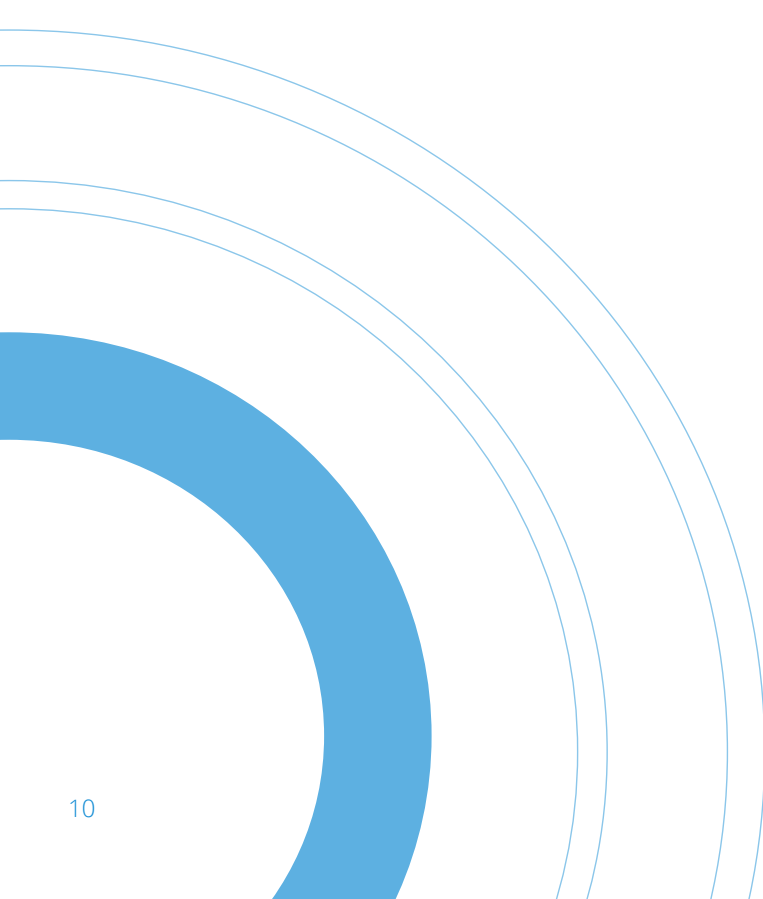
The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 introduced an enhanced biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty (the section 6 duty) for public authorities in the exercise of functions in relation to Wales.

The section 6 duty requires that public authorities 'seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity so far as consistent with the proper exercise of their functions and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems'.

To comply with the duty public authorities should embed the consideration of biodiversity and ecosystems into their early thinking and business planning, including any policies, plans, programmes and projects, as well as their day-to-day activities.

PSOW falls within the definition of public authority under the terms of the Act and so we are required to publish a report on how we complied with the section 6 duty.

Although PSOW is not subject to the full duties of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, we fully support the vision of the Act to create a more sustainable Wales.



# Action report

## Engage and support participation and understanding to embed biodiversity throughout decision making at all levels

Attention to sustainability is integrated into our key policies and strategic plans. For example:

- Our Corporate Plan 2019/20-2021/22 contains a commitment to 'embed the principle of sustainable development in the way we run our business, and to maximise our contribution to achieving the seven Welsh Wellbeing Goals'. The Plan also identifies Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in relation to waste and electricity.
- Our Procurement Policy requires that 'all procurement should consider sustainability issues'.

Our new draft Strategic Plan for 2023-2026 includes a commitment to reduce our carbon footprint.

With most of our staff continuing to work from home, we are aware of the need to promote and continue to work in ways that reduce staff carbon footprints. The biggest area of impact is to continue to help our staff work effectively from home. In March 2022, we also sent staff sunflower seeds to plant. This was to support staff well-being and in response to the crisis in the Ukraine. We recognise that even small actions can have positive environmental impact and will continue to support staff to reduce their environmental impact.

We have also set up an electric car charging point in our office carpark.

## Tackle key pressures on species and habitats

Our office building is leased, which limits our ability to make changes to the energy efficiency of the building. Because of that, our work to improve sustainability and reduce any adverse impact on the environment has focused on reducing waste, energy use and emissions.

Our performance during 2020/21 was significantly affected by the arrangements we put in place early in the COVID-19 pandemic. As restrictions were eased in 2021/22, we continued to support staff to work at home but made greater use of our offices as services returned to normal. This increased energy use and waste.



### Waste

Over the recent years, we have taken steps to significantly reduce our waste. For example, all our case sub files are now sent to the professional advisors in an electronic format. We use Objective Connect to allow us to send large files securely online. As we returned to using our offices more extensively in 2021/22, the amount of waste that we produced has increased compared to 2020/21. However, we still produced much less waste than in 2019/20.

During 2021/22, we recycled 94% of waste, compared to 76% in 2020/21. As in the previous year, we sent 0% waste to landfill.



### Electricity

Compared to last year, we increased our energy usage slightly, reflecting the fact that some staff have returned to the office as COVID-19 restrictions have eased.

#### Electricity usage (kWh)

2020/21	2021/22
72226	73754

Waste type	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Confidential Waste (kg)	8650	1480	7920
Mixed Recycling (kg)	2346	485	712
General Waste (kg)	16000	625	573
<b>Total</b>	<b>26996</b>	<b>2590</b>	<b>9205</b>
CO2e saved (kg)	-	978	1228



## Emissions

In terms of emissions, the COVID-19 lockdown and travel restrictions imposed in March 2020 had a substantial impact on the emissions generated by our staff by business travel and commuting during 2020/21. Even with restrictions being eased during 2021/22, we supported staff to work effectively at home and our emissions from travel did not increase.

	2020/21	2021/22
Number of staff who are normally based in the PSOW office (part time / full time)	72 (20 PT/52 FT)	74 (22 PT/52 FT)
Number of staff Working at Home for part of the week	72	74
Working at Home days per average week	308	315
Average commuting mileage a day saved	2281	2706
Average kgs of CO2 in emissions avoided	182309	176404

## Put in place a framework of governance and support for delivery

Responsibility for PSOW's performance on sustainability lies with the Chief Operating Officer & Director of Improvement and the Head of Corporate Services. The Head of Corporate Services undertakes internal reviews of PSOW performance on sustainability on an annual basis.

The findings of the process are communicated to PSOW's Management Team, and these serve to inform our strategic planning as well as this annual sustainability report.

## In 2020/21, we committed to:



### **Review our methodology for measuring our greenhouse gas emissions to include emission from home working.**

We have explored some tools that could help us do this. However, we have not identified a tool that would be simple and reliable enough for our purposes. We will continue to evaluate the options available during 2022/23.



### **Review the impact of COVID-19 on our supplier and procurement arrangements.**

Our procurement during the year was limited. Whilst COVID-19 undoubtedly affected suppliers, there has been little visible impact on supplier availability and procurement. We continue to use local suppliers where possible to reduce carbon footprint of our procurement.



### **Work to limit increases in office waste generated and energy used, as we return to some office-based working.**

Overall, apart from a small increase in waste and very small increase in the energy usage, our gradual return to office-based working has not so far had a significant negative effect on our sustainability performance.



### **Work with the Wellbeing Group to consider volunteer activities that support the environment.**

Given the pressure on our staff during 2021/22, and concerns about additional mixing of staff during the pandemic, we have been cautious about placing on staff additional expectations regarding participation in volunteer activities.



### **Consider using 'plant-a-tree' schemes such as search engine extensions with our browsers.**

We have explored the use of web search engines that could support sustainability. A proposal to use Ecosia as the default search engine for PSOW staff is to be put forward for approval. Ecosia uses revenue generated by web searches / advertising to plant trees.

# Climate change and climate change risk

Our impact on climate change is limited by the nature of the business, and our ability to control some aspects is limited by our occupation of a rented and shared building on a managed business park. That said, it is important that we understand our impact and take steps to minimise adverse impact and to manage the consequences of climate change. In particular we can:

- consider what we do and how we can have an impact climate change, even where our impact may be small
- minimise and mitigate waste, energy and emissions
- manage risk associated with climate change.

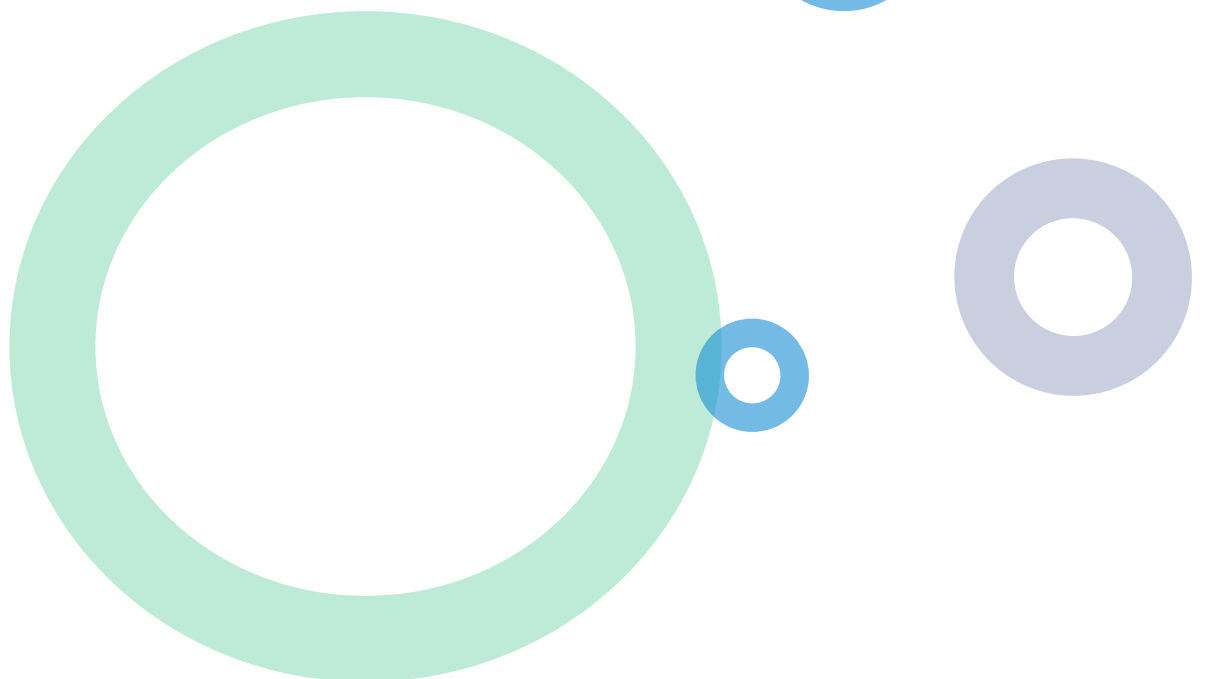
This report includes our consideration of our impact on climate change, as well as biodiversity, ecosystems and sustainability.

We will include appropriate climate change risk in our risk register, for consideration by our Management team and our Audit & Risk Assurance Committee.

## Reporting and planning

We continue to monitor and report on performance of sustainability on an annual basis. In compliance with the requirements under section 6, sub-section (6) of the Environment Act 2016, we identify at the same time any areas for improvement. Looking forward, these will include:

- reviewing the tools available to comprehensively evaluate our carbon footprint and undertake any training required to use them;
- considering the sustainability impact of reducing / adjusting our office space; and
- encouraging staff to consider ways they can reduce their environmental impact.







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