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Ask for:

Communications



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Date: 9 September 2024



Caseinfo@ombudsman.wales

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Dyfed Edwards  
Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board

**By email only**  
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carol.shillabeer3@wales.nhs.uk

## Annual Letter 2023/24

Dear Dyfed

### Role of PSOW

As you know, the role of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales is to consider complaints about public services, to investigate alleged breaches of the councillor Code of Conduct, to set standards for complaints handling by public bodies and to drive improvement in complaints handling and learning from complaints. I also undertake investigations into public services on my own initiative.

### Purpose of letter

This letter is intended to provide an update on the work of my office, to share key issues for health boards in Wales and to highlight any particular issues for your organisation, together with actions I would like your organisation to take.

### Overview of 2023/24

This letter, as always, coincides with my Annual Report – “A New Chapter Unfolds” – and comes at a time when public services continue to be in the spotlight, and under considerable pressures. My office has seen another increase in the number of people asking for our help – a 17% increase in overall contacts compared to the previous year, with nearly 10,000 enquiries and complaints received. Our caseload has increased substantially - by 37% - since 2019.

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We are happy to accept and respond  
to correspondence in Welsh.

During 2023/24 we considered and closed more enquiries and complaints than we ever have done before, and we reduced the average cost for each case and investigation. We started the year with a focus on reducing our aging cases, those over 12 months old, by 50% by the end of the year. These cases are often the most complex and distressing for the people making the complaint. I am extremely pleased to say we exceeded this target, reducing our aged investigations by over 70%. We are now well on track to meeting our objective to complete investigation of complaints within 12 months.

### **Public Service Complaints and compliance with recommendations**

We received 939 complaints about health boards last year – roughly the same number as the previous year. During this period, we intervened in (upheld, settled or resolved at an early stage) 31% of health board complaints - a similar proportion to previous years.

Last year, we received 214 complaints about Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, we closed 256 (some complaints were carried over from the previous year) and intervened in 32% of cases. Further information on the complaints we dealt with last year can be found in the appendices.

We published 3 public reports in the public interest relating to care and treatment delivered by the Health Board, one of which was issued following an investigation undertaken on our own initiative. I am pleased that the Health Board has complied with the recommendations in these reports.

In total, we made 253 recommendations to your health board during the year. To ensure that our investigations and reports drive improvement, we follow up compliance with the recommendations agreed with your organisation. In 2023/24, 246 recommendations were due and 58% were complied with in the timescale agreed. The remainder were complied with, but outside the timescales agreed, or remained outstanding as at 9 April 2024.

Recommendations and timescales for complying with recommendations are always agreed with the public body concerned before being finalised, and we therefore expect organisations to comply within the timescales agreed.

Further to the report my office issued in June 2023, [Groundhog Day 2: An opportunity for cultural change in complaint handling?](#) I wish to thank the Health Board for its consideration of the report and recommendations. I trust that it has ensured that lessons learned from the PSOW's findings and recommendations on cases we considered last year are included in your Health Board's Annual Report on the Duty of Candour and Quality.

## **Supporting improvement of public services**

We continued our work on supporting improvement in public services last year and worked on our second wider Own Initiative investigation. The investigation considers carers' needs assessments undertaken by local authorities in Wales. My report on this work will be finalised and published in the near future.

We have continued our work on complaints handling standards for public bodies in Wales and now have 56 public bodies following our model complaints handling policy. These public bodies account for around 85% of the complaints we receive.

We continued our work to publish complaints statistics into a third year with data, gathered from public bodies, now published twice a year. This data allows us to see information with greater context – for example, last year 10% of complaints made to Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board's complaints went on to be referred to PSOW - the highest proportion of any Health Board. I would encourage all health boards to use this data to better understand their performance on complaints and ensure that all complaints are appropriately logged.

I have written recently to your Chief Executive about the significant reduction in the number of complaints recorded by Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board over the past 3 years – 4,854 in 2021/22 down to 2,469 in 2023/24. At the same time, the number of complaints referred to my office about Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board has, as indicated above, remained high. I am sure that you will wish to receive assurances that all complaints received are correctly recorded, that all who wish to complain are able to do so and that learning from complaints is used to improve outcomes for all service users

Colleagues from my Improvement Team continue to meet regularly with Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board to discuss compliance with our recommendations and our complaints standards work. We have seen real benefit come from these conversations, as well as improved working relationships, and we would like to pass on our thanks to Denise Williams and their team for their work with our officers.

## **Action we would like your organisation to take**

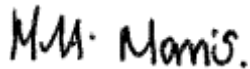
Further to this letter can I ask that Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board takes the following actions:

- Present my Annual Letter to the Board at the next available opportunity and notify me of when these meetings will take place.
- Consider the data in this letter, alongside your own data, to understand more about your performance on complaints, including any patterns or trends and your organisation's compliance with recommendations made by my office.

- Provide assurance that all complaints received are correctly recorded, that all who wish to complain are able to do so and that learning from complaints is used to improve outcomes for all service users.
- Provide my office with a copy of the Health Board's Annual Report for 2023/24 on the Duty of Candour and Quality.
- Inform me of the outcome of the Board's considerations and proposed actions on the above matters at your earliest opportunity.

Finally, I would like to thank you, and your teams, for your work with my officers in the last year. Their work is important in ensuring that patients and families receive timely and thorough responses to complaints, and in improving outcomes for all service users – not just those who complain.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M.M. Morris". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

**Michelle Morris**  
Public Services Ombudsman

Cc. Carol Shillabeer, Chief Executive, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board



## Factsheet

### Appendix A - Complaints Received

<b>Health Board</b>	<b>Complaints Received</b>	<b>Received per 1,000 residents</b>
Aneurin Bevan University Health Board	175	0.30
Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board	214	0.31
Cardiff and Vale University Health Board	150	0.30
Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board	109	0.25
Hywel Dda University Health Board	138	0.36
Powys Teaching Health Board	21	0.16
Swansea Bay University Health Board	132	0.35
<b>Total</b>	<b>939</b>	<b>0.30</b>



Appendix B - Received by Subject

<b>Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board</b>	<b>Complaints Received</b>	<b>% share</b>
<b>Admissions/discharge and transfer procedures</b>	4	2%
<b>Adult Mental Health</b>	16	9%
<b>Ambulance Services</b>	0	0%
<b>Appointment procedures (including outpatients)</b>	6	3%
<b>Child and Adolescent Mental Health</b>	2	1%
<b>Clinical treatment in hospital</b>	107	50%
<b>Clinical treatment outside hospital*</b>	14	7%
<b>Complaints Handling</b>	36	17%
<b>Covid-19</b>	1	0%
<b>Continuing care</b>	2	1%
<b>De-Registration</b>	0	0%
<b>Disclosure of personal information / data loss</b>	0	0%
<b>Funding</b>	1	0%
<b>Independent Health Care providers</b>	0	0%
<b>Medical records/standards of record-keeping</b>	4	2%
<b>Medication &gt; Prescription dispensing</b>	0	0%
<b>Non-medical services</b>	0	0%
<b>Nosocomial*</b>	0	0%
<b>Other*</b>	2	1%
<b>Out of Hours GP care</b>	0	0%
<b>Parking (including enforcement and bailiffs)</b>	0	0%
<b>Patient list issues</b>	5	2%
<b>Poor/No communication or failure to provide information</b>	2	1%
<b>Prisoner Care</b>	3	1%
<b>Recruitment and appointment procedures</b>	0	0%
<b>Referral to Treatment Times</b>	2	1%
<b>Regulation and Inspection (including private sector provision)</b>	1	0%
<b>Rudeness/inconsiderate behaviour/staff attitude</b>	2	1%
<b>Services for people with a disability inc DFGs</b>	0	0%
<b>Service for vulnerable Adults (eg with learning difficulties or mental health issues)</b>	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>214</b>	



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## Appendix C - Complaint Outcomes (\* denotes intervention)

<b>Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board</b>		<b>% Share</b>
Out of Jurisdiction	47	18%
Premature	30	12%
Other cases closed after initial consideration	83	32%
Early Resolution/ voluntary settlement*	40	16%
Discontinued	3	1%
Other Reports - Not Upheld	12	5%
Other Reports Upheld*	37	14%
Public Interest Reports*	4	2%
Special Interest Reports*	0	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>256</b>	



Appendix D - Cases with PSOW Intervention

	<b>No. of Interventions</b>	<b>No. of Closures</b>	<b>% of Interventions</b>
Aneurin Bevan University Health Board	73	195	37%
Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board	81	256	32%
Cardiff and Vale University Health Board	34	158	22%
Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board	39	129	30%
Hywel Dda University Health Board	55	154	36%
Powys Teaching Health Board	3	21	14%
Swansea Bay University Health Board	41	141	29%
<b>Total</b>	<b>326</b>	<b>1054</b>	<b>31%</b>





Appendix E – Compliance performance comparison

Health Board	Number of recommendations made in 2023-24	Number of Recommendations falling due in 2023-24	% of recommendations, complied with on time
Aneurin Bevan University Health Board	209	208	75%
Cardiff and Vale University Health Board	104	95	81%
Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board	123	121	60%
Swansea Bay University Health Board	119	127	62%
Hywel Dda University Health Board	160	151	81%
Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board	253	246	58%
Powys Teaching Health Board	10	12	67%



## Information Sheet

**Appendix A** shows the number of complaints received by PSOW for all Health Boards in 2023/24. These complaints are contextualised by the number of people each health board reportedly serves.

**Appendix B** shows the categorisation of each complaint received, and what proportion of received complaints represents for the Health Board.

**Appendix C** shows outcomes of the complaints which PSOW closed for the Health Board in 2023/24. This table shows both the volume, and the proportion that each outcome represents for the Health Board.

**Appendix D** shows Intervention Rates for all Health Boards in 2023/24. An intervention is categorised by either an upheld complaint (either public interest or non-public interest), an early resolution, or a voluntary settlement.

**Appendix E** shows compliance performance for all Health Boards.