

Easy Read



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# Equality matters

A report about making services fair and equal for everyone



This document was written by the **Public Services Ombudsman for Wales**. It is an easy read version of 'Equality Matters – improving inclusion and accessibility in public services in Wales'.

January 2025

# How to use this document



This is an easy read document. You may still need support to read it. Ask someone you know to help you.



Words in **bold blue writing** may be hard to understand. You can check what the words in blue mean on **page 26**.



Where the document says **we**, this means the **Public Services Ombudsman for Wales**. For more information or to get this report in a different format contact:

**Website:** [www.ombudsman.wales](http://www.ombudsman.wales)

**Email:** [communications@ombudsman.wales](mailto:communications@ombudsman.wales)

**Phone:** 0300 790 0203



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# Introduction



We are the office of the **Public Services Ombudsman for Wales**.



We:

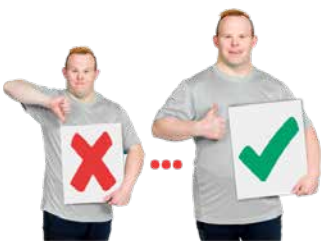
- Look into complaints about **public services** in Wales.



**Public services** are services paid for by Government. For example, local councils, and the NHS.



- Look into complaints about Welsh councillors.



- Work with **public services** and local councils to make things better.

## How we work



We are independent. This means we are not controlled by the government.



Our service is fair and free for everyone.

## Equality and Human Rights



We follow UK laws and international rules on **equality** and **human rights** to make sure everyone is treated fairly.

**Equality** means treating people fairly and making sure they have the same chances in life.



When we look at complaints, we follow laws like:

- **Equality Act 2010**
- **Human Rights Act 1998**
- **FREDA** Principles. FREDA stands for:
  - Fairness
  - Respect
  - Equality
  - **Dignity**



**Dignity** means treating people with respect and kindness.



- **Autonomy**

**Autonomy** means the right to make your own choices.

## What we cannot do



We cannot decide if you faced **discrimination**.

**Discrimination** is when you are treated badly or unfairly. Because of things like your sex, race, religion, disability or sexual identity.

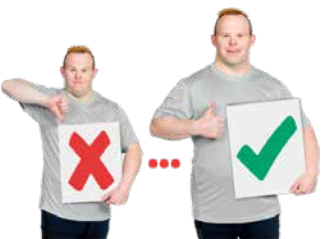


Only law courts can decide about discrimination.

## What we can do



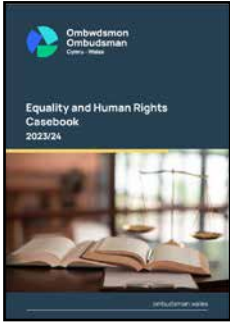
If we think there are human rights or equality issues in a complaint, we will say so clearly.



We will also say what should happen next to make things better.



# About this report



We share examples of equality and human rights issues in our **Equality and Human Rights Casebook** every year.



But we keep getting the same issues in complaints. That is why we wrote this report.

The aim of this report is to:



- Share what we learnt.



- Help **public services** in Wales improve **inclusion** and **accessibility** for everyone.

**Inclusion** means everyone can take part, and have a fair chance.





**Accessibility** means making sure everyone can use something, no matter what their needs are.

This report helps us better understand:



- what the problems are



- how we can solve them.

# What we learnt



We looked at complaint cases closed between April 2023 and September 2024.



We found some common problems that people had when trying to access **public services**.

## Reasonable adjustments



**Reasonable adjustments** are changes made so that disabled people can do things like everyone else. For example, putting ramps in buildings for wheelchair users. Or giving information in easy read.



We had many complaints about **public services** not making **reasonable adjustments**.



Under the **Equality Act**, all **public services** must make **reasonable adjustments**. This is so disabled people can access their services.



Our **Principle 1** is to **get it right**. This means:

- Following the law.
- Respecting the rights of people involved.



Making **reasonable adjustments** is important to protect the rights of disabled people. It gives people equal chances to access services.



Without these adjustments, disabled people may not get the service they need. This could affect their lives in a big way.

## Example



Ms A complained about the care her sister, Ms B, received from Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board.



Ms B has learning disabilities and health conditions. She needs care 24 hours a day.

The Health Board did not:



- Give the right care or support for her needs.



- Make **reasonable adjustments** to make sure they treated her fairly.



The Health Board did not think about Ms B's needs as a disabled person. This caused poor care and distress for her and her family.

## What we did:

After our investigation, the Health Board agreed to:



- Review their care planning.



- Check care plans to make **reasonable adjustments**.



- Check and improve how they help people with learning disabilities. So they get the right care and support when they are in pain.



- Give training to staff.



- Work with local social services. To make sure there are enough staff for people with extra needs.

# Communication needs



Communication is how we share information. It includes speaking and writing.



Good communication is important to make sure **public services** work well.



Sometimes, **public services** need to change the way they share information to help people.



Some people need information in a different way, like Easy Read, to help them understand.



We found out that some **public services** have not thought enough about people's communication needs.



When communication needs are not met:

- It can affect the quality of the service.
- People do not get the support they need.



Our **Principle 2** is to be **customer focused**. This means:

- Making sure it is easy for people to access services.
- Responding to people's needs in a flexible way.



We are raising awareness with **public services** about the importance of:

- thinking about people's needs
- and responding in the right way.



## Example



Ms I complained that she was not happy with how Cardiff Council responded to her complaint.

She had problems with:



- Flies in her property from bins outside.



- Housing officers.



- The way they shared information because of her disability.



We found out that the Council had not solved the fly problem.



Ms I's relationship with housing officers was not good.



It was not clear if there were **reasonable adjustments** for communication.

### What we did:

We worked with the Council to:



- Confirm **reasonable adjustments** for Ms I.



- Get her a new housing officer.



- Arrange for fly screens to be installed in her property.

# Policies and guidance



Some **public services** have policies that do not follow equality and human rights laws. They have not checked or updated their policies when needed.



Our **Principle 3** is to be **clear** and **open**. This means:

- Information must be clear, right and complete.
- Policies and procedures should be regularly updated to follow **equality** and human rights laws.

**Public services** must make sure:



- Staff know about making **reasonable adjustments** to help individuals access services.



- Staff get training so they feel confident and supported to make decisions.

## Example



Ms J complained about Bron Afon Housing Ltd.



She was upset that the **Adaptations Panel** did not agree to fund changes to her home. She wanted to make changes to her home so her disabled daughter could continue living there.



Ms J felt the family was not given a chance to explain their issue direct to the Panel. They felt the Panel ignored their views.



She also thought the Panel's decision ignored their rights under the **Equality Act**.



We found out that the Panel did think about the views of the family when making a decision.



There is no rule that lets families speak direct to the Panel.



The Housing Association followed their policy and guidelines when making decisions.



We found the Housing Association's decision was fair and in line with the **Equality Act**.

### What we did:



We noted that the Housing Association's guidelines were out of date from 2009.



They need to update these guidelines to include the latest laws, including the **Equality Act**.

## Good practice



Some public services are doing a good job.

## Example



Mrs K complained about the care and treatment she received from her GP clinic.



She said the clinic did not make **reasonable adjustments** to suit her needs. Mrs K has **complex post-traumatic stress disorder**.



She had asked the clinic many times to send her information by email. She said they told her she could not use email to book appointments.



We found out that the GP Practice apologised for not responding to Mrs K's emails.

The Practice explained to Mrs K:



- She could book routine appointments online up to 4 weeks in advance.



- She could ask for changes to appointments by email.



- Mrs K could also contact the Practice by email for general enquiries and prescriptions.



- But she needed to ask for urgent appointments by phone, due to the booking system for those appointments.





We found that the Practice had made **reasonable adjustments** where possible. They had explained clearly how and when Mrs K should use each method of contact.



This example shows how the GP Practice worked well to meet Mrs s needs.

# What should happen next



**Public services** must follow the **Equality Act** and **Human Rights Act**. They must make sure their services are fair and **accessible** to everyone.

We want **public services** to share this report with:



- The Board or Committee responsible for an organisation's equality duties.



- The person in charge of **Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion**.

**Diversity** means we are all different. For example, people have different backgrounds, abilities, beliefs and ages.

We want public services to:



- Encourage staff to be **person-centred**. This means focusing on what each person wants and needs.



- Get their staff to think ahead about what people might need.



- Make sure staff keep a record of when they make **reasonable adjustments**.



- Check their policies and keep them updated.



- Make sure staff receive the right training and know the policies. They should also feel supported when making decisions to meet the needs of people.



- Make sure staff know who to contact for help and advice when dealing with equality and human rights issues.

# Hard words

## Accessibility

Accessibility means making sure everyone can use something, no matter what their needs are.

## Autonomy

Autonomy means the right to make your own choices.

## Dignity

Dignity means treating people with respect and kindness.

## Discrimination

Discrimination is when you are treated badly or unfairly. Because of things like your sex, race, religion, disability or sexual identity.

## Diversity

Diversity means we are all different. For example, people have different backgrounds, abilities, beliefs and ages.

## **Equality**

Equality means treating people fairly and making sure they have the same chances in life.

## **Inclusion**

Inclusion means everyone can take part, and everyone has a fair chance.

## **Public services**

Public services are services paid for by Government. For example, local councils, and the NHS.

## **Reasonable adjustments**

Reasonable adjustments are changes made so that disabled people can do things like everyone else. For example, putting ramps in buildings for wheelchair users. Or giving information in easy read.