

Strategic Plan

2009/10 to 2011/12

Contributing to Excellence

Foreword by the Ombudsman

When I took on the office of Public Services Ombudsman for Wales in April 2008, I inherited a service that had been well established and was functioning effectively. My predecessor, Adam Peat and his team had brought together the three former jurisdictions and welded them into a single seamless entity. The staff, whether from the existing service or newly recruited, were well motivated, highly skilled and effectively managed.

In the course of my first year, demand for the service has continued to grow substantially, and this, together with a strong desire to respond to the needs of our users, has led to the development of this Three Year Strategic Plan. Its predecessor was properly concerned with developing the new organisation; this Plan is intended to take the now maturing organisation forward into its next phase of development.

In my first year, along with colleagues, I have met with representatives of public bodies in a series of seminars across Wales, and also by attending meetings of their representative groups. We have carefully reflected on the views of complainants, as reflected in contact on individual cases and also through regular surveys, and as a staff group we have met and reflected on the lessons we have learnt from our work. We have also looked at the way other ombudsmans' services have tackled the issues they face, and tried to draw on their solutions where they were appropriate to our circumstances.

Ultimately, we wish to ensure that there is an independent, fair and objective service available to members of the public who believe that they have not been treated fairly, or that their councillors have not behaved in accordance with their Code of Conduct. When we find that members of the public have suffered an injustice because of maladministration, we aim to help them to achieve the position they would have been in had the injustice not occurred. In addition, we aim to ensure that the lessons which can be drawn from complaints are learned by individual public bodies and by regulators.

In order to develop the service we offer, we are looking at a major review of the way in which we deal with complaints from members of the public. We want to reduce the time it takes for us to let them know whether their complaint is one we can investigate, and to make the process less bureaucratic. We also want to communicate with people as much as possible using the medium they tell us they prefer, which will mean increasingly telephone, email and the web, and less often through letters.

We will provide more and better information to public bodies about the lessons we have learned from investigating complaints.

We will improve our governance arrangements, to give greater reassurance that the public money which we use is spent efficiently and effectively.

We are conscious that people who are more likely to be excluded from our communities depend heavily on public services, so we will redouble our efforts to make our services more accessible to them by focusing the next phase of our outreach work in this way.

This plan therefore sets out our vision and the values we work to, and describes a challenging development path for the next three years. We believe that it will help us to ensure that we make a full contribution to the development of better public services for everyone in Wales.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Tyndall'.

Peter Tyndall
Ombudsman

Our vision

To contribute to the development of excellent public services in Wales by ensuring that service providers continue to value and learn from complaints.

Our values

Accessibility – to be open to everyone from all of our communities and work to ensure that people who face challenges in access are not excluded. We will be courteous, respectful and approachable, and communicate with complainants in the way they tell us they prefer.

Excellence – to be professional and authoritative in all that we do and promote excellence in the services with which we work.

Learning – we believe that we should improve through learning from our own experiences and should help others to learn from theirs.

Fairness – we will maintain our independence and reach decisions objectively having carefully considered the facts.

Effectiveness – we will make sure that we use resources to secure best value for the public purse.

Being good employers – we will continue to invest in our well trained and well motivated staff.

Our purposes

- To consider complaints about public bodies.
- To consider complaints that members of local authorities have broken the code of conduct.
- To put things right – we aim to put people back in the position they would have been in if they had not suffered an injustice, and work to secure the best possible outcome where injustice has occurred.
- To recognise and share good practice.
- To work with public bodies so that lessons from our investigations are learnt.
- To ensure continued improvement in the standards of public services in Wales by helping bodies to get it right first time – we will work to reduce complaints by helping service providers to improve their initial decision making.

Strategic aims

The strategic aims in this plan are ones we look to achieve over the period of the next three years. The first step towards achieving these will be through the key priorities and key delivery targets set for the forthcoming year.

Detailed objectives and targets for 2009/10 will be set in the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales's annual Operational Plan. Key priorities and targets for 2010/11 and 2011/12 will be included in the Plans for those years.

Strategic Aim 1: To raise awareness of our service so that people understand what we do, and that all who need it can access it and make use of it.

Key priorities for 2009/10:

- Revise and supplement the current information leaflets made available to members of the public.
- Further enhance the information on our website, to provide better advice to potential complainants.
- Build upon the generic meetings with voluntary/advocacy organisations held in 2007/08 by holding meetings that specifically engage with communities who may be particularly vulnerable to exclusion from our service.
- Hold seminars for public body contact/complaints officers to discuss and improve knowledge of our role and how we work to develop more effective communication around complaints.

Strategic Aim 2: To have in place high quality complaints handling processes, which consider and determine complaints thoroughly but proportionately, and convey decisions clearly.

Key priorities for 2009/10:

- Revise our first contact arrangements so that they are more informative, meaningful and effective.
- Review our complaints handling procedures, including:
 - consideration of how these might be streamlined and made more flexible to help deal with the ever increasing caseload, ensuring that complaints are looked into thoroughly and cases concluded as quickly as possible
 - improving the way we communicate with complainants and public bodies throughout the progress of each case.
- Embed in our revised arrangements our human rights approach to our work.

Strategic Aim 3: To work with public bodies in Wales so that better quality public services are provided as a result of the lessons that can be learnt from the complaints we investigate.

Key priorities for 2009/10:

- Improve our arrangements for capturing lessons learnt from the complaints we investigate.
- Develop our communications so that best practice and lessons learnt can more easily and effectively be shared with public bodies.
- Engage with the Welsh Assembly Government in its consideration of developing a common complaints process for public bodies in Wales and seek opportunities to promote good complaint handling principles and practices.
- Contribute to the Welsh Assembly Government's reform of the funding of care, by sharing our learning on existing problems resulting from disparate social care and health care funding systems.
- Following consultation, publish guidance on the new Code of Conduct for local authority members.

Strategic Aim 4: To demonstrate that our resources are efficiently and effectively deployed.

Key priorities for 2009/10:

- Develop the Audit Committee's role by increasing the level of independent membership and extending its remit.
- Continue our improvements to staff development by systematically developing our training and other programmes to ensure a strong linkage between our strategic objectives and our workforce development, with the eventual aim of being recognised as Investors in People.
- Following the review of our complaint management processes, make any necessary changes to the organisational structure to ensure that it is fit for purpose.
- Further develop existing Information and Communications Technology systems, with a particular focus on ensuring that they are able to support changes introduced to first contact and complaint handling arrangements, and establish future software requirements and begin to take the steps necessary to procure an upgrade or replacement.
- Instigate systems for recording the outcomes of the planned changes including surveying users of the new first contact arrangements and measuring changes in the time taken to process complaints.
- Ensure that all developments are managed within the agreed budget.
- Further build upon our risk management arrangements so that these support strategic prioritisation and decision making.

Key Delivery Targets

The key delivery targets below have been set to underpin the strategic aims of this three year plan and the key priorities set for 2008/09.

Service Delivery Area	Target	Underpinning
First contact	By April 2010 we will have developed and introduced new first contact arrangements.	Strategic Aims 1 and 2
Complaints Handling	By April 2010 we will have developed and introduced a new process and procedures for considering and investigating complaints.	Strategic Aims 1 and 2
Communication	By April 2010 we will have introduced more extensive information for complainants and new regular communications channels with bodies in jurisdiction.	Strategic Aims 1, 2 and 3
Governance	By April 2010 we will have strengthened the governance of the office of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.	Strategic Aim 4

Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

April 2009

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