

Ask for: Complaints Standards



01656 641150



Caseinfo@ombudsman.wales

Date: 17 September 2026

Cllr John Spanswick
Leader of the Council
Bridgend County Borough Council

By email only
Cllr.John.Spanswick@Bridgend.gov.uk

Dear Councillor Spanswick

Annual Letter 2025-26

Our Role

As the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, we independently consider complaints about public services and investigate alleged breaches of the councillor Code of Conduct. We also set complaints handling standards for public bodies, drive continuous learning from complaints and undertake investigations into public services on our own initiative.

Purpose of this Annual Letter

This letter provides an update on our work for this period, and highlights key trends in Welsh local government complaints. It details performance specific to your organisation and outlines the positive actions we would like you to take.

Overview - a record-breaking year

This letter, as always, coincides with the publication of our Annual Report, which holds special significance this year as we mark our 20th anniversary. We closed our busiest year on record where the office received 4,507 duly made complaints across its public services and Code of Conduct remits — 27% more than last year, 47% more than 3 years ago, and 3 times as many as 20 years ago.

To meet this demand, we closed a record number of complaints, 29% more than last year and 43% more compared with 3 years ago. We intervened in 568 of complaints that we closed.

Finding swift resolutions to complaints, where possible, remains important to us and benefits all parties involved. This year, 85% of our interventions included an element of Early Resolution, a process we hope has proved valuable to both your organisation and to complainants.

Despite the increased volume of cases, our case handling times remained efficient. Initial assessments and Early Resolutions were completed within 4 weeks - well ahead of our 6 week target. Additionally we maintained a downward trend in our average investigation time which was 54 weeks this year from 64 weeks in 2023-24.

Overview of Local Authority complaints

During 2025-26, we received 1,704 complaints about local authorities across Wales. This is a 27% annual increase and 67% more when compared to 3 years ago.

These complaints most commonly related to housing, social services, environment and environmental health, complaint handling, and planning.

Across the sector we intervened in 9% of local authority complaints that we closed – a similar proportion to recent years.

Performance Specific to your Authority

During 2025-26 we received 68 complaints about your Authority and closed 67 complaints (some complaints were carried over from the previous year).

We intervened in 4% of the complaints we closed about your Authority.

We made 10 new recommendation(s) to your Authority in the cases closed this year.

There were 10 recommendation(s) that fell due during this period. Your Authority complied with 70% of these within the agreed timescales.

Detailed data on the complaints we handled about your organisation in this period can be found in the appendices below.

Improving compliance with our recommendations

We always take time to ensure that recommendations and timescales are agreed with public bodies before finalising them. Therefore we expect agreed deadlines to be met. Timely compliance is not, however, as high as it should be; with only 69% of our recommendations across Wales complied with on time as at 31 March 2026. Promptly delivering agreements to resolve injustice or hardship for individuals, and implementing systemic learning on time, is vital to build and maintain public trust in both our office and your organisation.

We recognise that unexpected challenges arise that make deadlines difficult to meet. In response to feedback from public bodies, we have adapted our approach moving forward: if you request a reasonable extension on or before the original deadline, and you meet that new date, it will be recorded as complied with on time. We hope this is a welcome adjustment that will help demonstrate a more accurate compliance rate over the coming years.

Our Code of Conduct work

It is important for local democracy that elected and where appropriate co-opted members uphold the highest standards of integrity, accountability, and respect. We take our duty to investigate alleged breaches of the councillor Code of Conduct seriously. When we consider, following investigation, that sanctions such as suspension or disqualification may be appropriate and in the public interest, we refer these cases to local Standards Committees or to the Adjudication Panel for Wales (“APW”).

Code of Conduct complaints remained broadly stable compared to last year, increasing by 3%.

The majority (58%) involved members of Town and Community Councils.

We closed 85 cases we investigated last year – a significant increase on last year with 15 cases being referred to Standards Committees or the APW. Additionally, during the year we successfully and significantly reduced the number of aged investigations in our caseload with only 5 at 31 March 2026 compared to 25 at 31 March 2025.

Addressing disrespectful, bullying and harassing behaviour

I continue to be very concerned by the number of bullying and harassment allegations involving council staff. This year, we referred several particularly pernicious cases to the APW, resulting in lengthy disqualifications for some councillors.

These were not isolated incidents. We will continue to take complaints of this nature seriously and have taken steps to ensure that we appropriately prioritise the most serious cases we receive.

I would like to thank your Monitoring Officer for their professional engagement with my office during this period.

Supporting improvement of public services – key themes and our own initiative work

We continue to use of our own initiative powers. These allow us to investigate emerging issues proactively, addressing administrative failings before they multiply.

The Senedd entrusted us with the power to investigate under our own initiative, and it is key for us that this power delivers positive impact for the people of Wales.

Carers' needs assessments in Wales

This year we followed up on public bodies' compliance with our previously published report on carers' needs assessments. Our follow-up report noted that while all 4 investigated authorities took positive action, we had to issue further recommendations to 2 of the authorities to ensure full compliance.

Going forward all local authorities must maintain their focus on ensuring carers are informed of their rights and can access the information, advice, and support required to sustain their vital roles. I encourage you to read our follow-up report, if you have not already on our website - [here](#).

Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation

We shared findings from our own initiative investigation into Gypsy and Traveller accommodation in Cardiff with all local authorities. The sector wide learning emphasises that all councils must take timely action when demand exceeds accommodation capacity. This prevents prolonged poor living conditions that leave residents disadvantaged.

Housing conditions and our public interest reports

When an investigation reveals serious systemic risks that may affect many individuals, or offer wider sector lessons, we publish a public interest report.

We issued 9 public interest reports during this period. While the majority involved Health Boards, 4 are relevant to local authority work (2 were issued for Local Authorities and 2 for Housing Associations), specifically focussing on residents living in unacceptable housing conditions. If you have not already done so, I encourage you to read these reports for their valuable insights - [here](#).

I have stated before that unresolved damp, mould, and disrepair cause serious harm and distress, and disproportionately affect vulnerable tenants. I have continued to highlight cases where systemic maladministration, delayed responses, and missed opportunities by social landlords and local authorities were found. It is concerning that these issues continue to be seen, and this remains a key area of our further and ongoing own initiative work.

Ongoing own initiative investigations

As at March 2026, we were conducting a further 4 own initiative investigations which focus, among other things, on:

- How social landlords manage complaints about disrepair and damp and mould.
- Potential maladministration and service failure in health care.

We expect to complete this work later in 2026, and will determine then if the findings warrant publication in the public interest.

Our Complaints Standards Work

By the end of March 2026, all local authorities, health boards and 21 housing associations in Wales were operating under our model complaints policy. During 2025-26, we initiated the transition for the remaining housing associations and we expect them to be fully compliant by the end of September 2026.

Organisations that are already compliant, or will be shortly, account for 85% of new complaints about public services which we receive.

Our free complaint handling training remains highly requested; we delivered 58 sessions to public bodies across Wales this year, bringing our total since 2020 to over 600 sessions and 10,000 participants.

More broadly we expect to publish the data on complaints handled by local authorities in Wales during 2024-25 and 2025-26 in the Autumn.

Actions we would like your organisation to take

To build on findings from this period, can I ask that your organisation takes the following actions:

- Present this Annual Letter and associated data to the Cabinet and the Governance and Audit Committee at the earliest opportunity and notify me of the planned meetings dates.
- Review the data in this letter alongside your own data to better understand your complaint performance, identify trends, and review your compliance with the recommendations made by my office.
- Read the reports highlighted in this letter to extract relevant learning for your own Authority.

- Inform me of the outcome of your considerations and your proposed action plan at the earliest opportunity.

I would like to thank you and your officers, for your continued openness and engagement with my office. Our data shows that local authorities are looking into more complaints than ever before and that better outcomes for the people of Wales are achieved when information from complaints is fully utilised.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Morris

Public Services Ombudsman

Cc. jake.morgan@bridgend.gov.uk
charlotte.branford@bridgend.gov.uk
kelly.watson@bridgend.gov.uk

Information Sheet

Glossary of terms a guide to some of the terms used within our Annual Letters and Appendices.

Appendix A shows the number of complaints we received for all local authorities in 2025-26. These complaints are contextualised by the population of each authority.

Appendix B shows the number and proportion of complaints received by category.

Appendix C shows intervention rates for all local authorities in 2025-26. An intervention is categorised by either an upheld complaint (either public interest or non-public interest), an early resolution, or a voluntary settlement.

Appendix D shows outcomes of the complaints we closed for the local authority in 2025-26. This table shows both the number, and the proportion that each outcome represents for the local authority.

Appendix E shows the compliance performance of each local authority.

Appendix F shows the outcomes of Code of Conduct complaints we closed for local authorities in 2025-26. This table shows both the number, and the proportion that each outcome represents for the local authority.

Appendix G shows the outcomes of Code of Conduct complaints we closed related to Town and Community Councils in the local authority's area in 2025-26. This table shows both the number, and the proportion that each outcome represents for each Town or Community Council.

Annual Letters - Glossary of terms

Term	Definition
Complaints received	The number of duly made complaints we receive about a Public Body.
Duly made complaint	A complaint about public services is duly made when: - the organisation is within our jurisdiction and - the organisation has replied or had the opportunity to reply and - the events complained about happened less than a year ago, or the complainant became aware of them less than a year ago (unless there was a good reason the complainant could not complain sooner) and - the complainant is entitled to bring a complaint and - we have the details we need e.g. name, contact details, organisation being complained about, we can understand the complaint. A complaint about a local councillor is duly made when: - we have the details we need e.g. name and contact details of the complainant, the name of the councillor and the Local Authority they are a member of - we have a signed declaration from the complainant and any third parties whose evidence has been submitted.
Early Resolution	A matter which is closed without investigation because there is an obvious solution and the body agrees to carry out action to resolve the matter. The body must give us evidence that it has taken action within the timeframe agreed.
Intervention	Cases which we have closed and we have either: - Upheld the complaint after investigation. - Resolved the complaint by way of Voluntary Settlement. - Resolved the complaint by way of Early resolution.
Voluntary Settlement	A matter which has progressed to investigation stage but closed without investigation being completed because we agree that action which the body has voluntarily

	suggested it will take is appropriate to resolve the matter. The body must give us evidence that it has taken action within the timeframe agreed.
Uphold	A matter we have closed after investigation and where we found that something went wrong.
% of interventions	The number of public service complaints we closed that involved Early Resolution/Voluntary Settlement and those which we upheld following an investigation, divided by the total number of duly made public service complaints we closed in the reporting period.
Upheld %	The proportion of the complaints in which we intervened that we upheld in the reporting period, shown as a percentage.
Cases Closed	The number of complaints we closed during the reporting period. This may be different from the number we received because there may be some complaints we received in the previous reporting period but which we closed in this reporting period.
Recommendation	These are actions which we ask bodies to take within agreed timescales when we find something has gone wrong. These may be actions to help the individual complainant or systemic actions to help improve services for all service users. We can make recommendations as part of an Early Resolution, Voluntary Settlement or when upholding a complaint following investigation. When we make recommendations, organisations must provide evidence to us that they have complied.
Recommendations made	The number of recommendations we made to bodies during the reporting period. (1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026)
Recommendations falling due	The number of recommendations which needed to be complied with within the reporting period (1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026). Some recommendations will have been made in the previous reporting period but fell due within this reporting period.
Recommendations complied with in line	The number of recommendations which were complied with by the agreed timescale as set out in Early

with agreed target date %	Resolution, Voluntary Settlement or Investigation report (applicable for those falling due in 2025-26).
Population	Population is included to provide context, based upon the size of an organisation. However, it is recognised that complaints can be made by people who are not included in the population figure, for example, residents from outside the health board or local authority area, or non-contract holders. • For local authorities, population refers to the estimated total number of people living in the local authority area. The figures are taken from the StatsWales.¹ • For housing associations, population refers to the total stock at social rent, shown in units. This includes general needs stock, sheltered stock, other supported stock and extra care stock with non self-contained bedsits, hostels and shared housing. This figure is taken from StatsWales.² • For health boards, population refers to the estimated total number of people living in the health board area. The figures are taken from StatsWales.³

¹ [Population estimates by local authority, year, sex and age | StatsWales](#)

² [Social landlord housing stock, including social and non social housing | StatsWales](#)

³ [Population estimates by local health boards, year, sex and age | StatsWales](#)

Appendix A – Complaints received (overview)

	MAL			CODE			Total		
Local Authority	Complaints Received			Complaints Received			Complaints Received		
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	24	67,873	0.35	2	67,873	0.03	26	67,873	0.38
Bridgend County Borough Council	68	147,530	0.46	18	147,530	0.12	86	147,530	0.58
Caerphilly County Borough Council	79	176,865	0.45	5	176,865	0.03	84	176,865	0.47
Cardiff Council*	290	383,919	0.76	16	383,919	0.04	306	383,919	0.80
Carmarthenshire County Council	109	190,800	0.57	7	190,800	0.04	116	190,800	0.61
Ceredigion County Council	35	72,599	0.48	1	72,599	0.01	36	72,599	0.50
Conwy County Borough Council	50	114,891	0.44	9	114,891	0.08	59	114,891	0.51
Cyngor Gwynedd	47	120,813	0.39	3	120,813	0.02	50	120,813	0.41
Denbighshire County Council*	107	98,202	1.09	4	98,202	0.04	111	98,202	1.13
Flintshire County Council	113	155,867	0.72	4	155,867	0.03	117	155,867	0.75
Isle of Anglesey County Council	35	69,097	0.51	0	69,097	0.00	35	69,097	0.51
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council*	23	58,972	0.39	2	58,972	0.03	25	58,972	0.42
Monmouthshire County Council	37	94,930	0.39	6	94,930	0.06	43	94,930	0.45
Neath Port Talbot Council	54	143,249	0.38	11	143,249	0.08	65	143,249	0.45
Newport City Council	74	167,899	0.44	2	167,899	0.01	76	167,899	0.45
Pembrokeshire County Council	55	125,761	0.44	8	125,761	0.06	63	125,761	0.50
Powys County Council	90	135,059	0.67	7	135,059	0.05	97	135,059	0.72
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council*	98	242,844	0.40	2	242,844	0.01	100	242,844	0.41
Swansea Council	152	251,304	0.60	11	251,304	0.04	163	251,304	0.65
Torfaen County Borough Council	15	94,119	0.16	1	94,119	0.01	16	94,119	0.17
Vale of Glamorgan Council	79	135,743	0.58	8	135,743	0.06	87	135,743	0.64
Wrexham County Borough Council	70	138,245	0.51	9	138,245	0.07	79	138,245	0.57
Total	1704	3,186,581	0.53	136	3,186,581	0.04	1840	3,186,581	0.58

* inc 11 Rent Smart Wales

* inc 3 Wales Penalty Processing Partnership

* inc 3 South Wales Police and Crime Panel

* inc 3 South Wales Parking group

Appendix B – Complaints received (by organisation)

Bridgend County Borough Council	Complaints Received	% Share
Adult Social Services	10	15%
Agriculture and Fisheries	0	
Benefits Administration	1	1%
Children's Social Services	20	29%
Community Facilities. Recreation and Leisure	0	
Complaints Handling	5	7%
Covid 19	0	
Education	4	6%
Environment and Environmental Health	1	1%
Finance and Taxation	3	4%
Health	0	
Housing	7	10%
Licencing	0	
Planning and Building Control	6	9%
Roads and Transport	4	6%
Self Funding Care Provider	0	
Various Other	7	10%
Total	68	

Appendix C – Cases with PSOW intervention (overview)

Local authority	No. of interventions	No. of closures	% of interventions
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	0	24	0%
Bridgend County Borough Council	3	67	4%
Caerphilly County Borough Council	13	83	16%
Cardiff Council*	52	304	17%
Carmarthenshire County Council	9	106	8%
Ceredigion County Council	3	33	9%
Conwy County Borough Council	1	48	2%
Denbighshire County Council*	5	105	5%
Flintshire County Council	11	108	10%
Cyngor Gwynedd	7	49	14%
Isle of Anglesey County Council	4	36	11%
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council*	0	23	0%
Monmouthshire County Council	4	36	11%
Neath Port Talbot Council	7	60	12%
Newport City Council	3	71	4%
Pembrokeshire County Council	2	55	4%
Powys County Council	8	84	10%
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council*	4	97	4%
Swansea Council	10	151	7%
Torfaen County Borough Council	1	17	6%
Vale of Glamorgan Council	6	78	8%
Wrexham County Borough Council	4	72	6%
Total	157	1707	9%

* inc 11 Rent Smart Wales

* inc 3 Wales Penalty Processing Partnership

* inc 2 South Wales Police and Crime Panel

* inc 3 South Wales Parking group

Appendix D – Complaint outcomes (by organisation)

Bridgend County Borough Council		% Share
Complaint investigation discontinued (with early resolution at assessment stages)	0	
Complaint investigation discontinued (without settlement)	0	
Decision not to investigate complaint	24	36%
Early resolution	3	4%
Matter out of jurisdiction	20	30%
Non-public interest report issued: complaint not upheld	0	
Non-public interest report issued: complaint not upheld with early resolution at assessment stage	0	
Non-public interest report issued: complaint upheld	0	
Non-public interest report issued: complaint upheld with early resolution at assessment stage	0	
Premature	20	30%
Public interest report issued: complaint upheld	0	
Public Interest report issued: complaint upheld with early resolution at assessment stage	0	
Special Interest Report	0	
Voluntary settlement	0	
Total	67	

Appendix E – Compliance performance comparison

Local Authority	Number of recommendations made on complaints closed in 2025-26	Number of recommendations falling due in 2025-26	% of recommendations, complied with in line with agreed target date
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	0	0	n/a
Bridgend County Borough Council	10	10	70%
Caerphilly County Borough Council	34	29	41%
Cardiff Council*	164	136	85%
Carmarthenshire County Council	23	15	47%
Ceredigion County Council	10	10	80%
Conwy County Borough Council	1	1	100%
Denbighshire County Council**	11	10	50%
Flintshire County Council	38	39	49%
Cyngor Gwynedd	17	17	94%
Isle of Anglesey County Council	7	7	100%
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council	0	0	n/a
Monmouthshire County Council	8	6	83%
Neath Port Talbot Council	13	13	69%
Newport City Council	6	10	60%

Pembrokeshire County Council	4	7	43%
Powys County Council	18	15	53%
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council	13	12	50%
Swansea Council	45	40	90%
Torfaen County Borough Council	3	2	100%
Vale of Glamorgan Council	18	17	76%
Wrexham County Borough Council	10	13	92%

Appendix F - Code of Conduct complaints closed

Bridgend County Borough Council	
Cc not acted on	0
Code of Conduct leaflet sent/link to website provided	0
Complaint taken over telephone – awaiting signature	0
Complaint Withdrawn	0
Discontinued. Not in the public interest to pursue	1
Duplicate complaint with no new evidence	0
Information provided	0
No action necessary	0
No declaration rec'd – Withdrawn	0
No evidence of Breach	0
No prima facie evidence of breach	14
Not in the public interest to investigate	3
Out of Jurisdiction - signposted	0
Premature - referred for local resolution	1
Referred to Adjudication Panel	0
Referred to Standards Committee	0
Withdrawn	0
Total	19

Appendix G - Code of Conduct complaints closed related to Town and Community Councils in the Local Authority's area

Decision not to investigate Code			Investigations					
Bridgend County Borough Council	Not in the public interest to investigate	No prima facie evidence of breach	Discontinued. Not in the public interest to pursue	No action necessary	No evidence of Breach	Referred to Adjudication Panel	Referred to Standards Committee	Total
Brackla Community Council	8	6	0	0	0	0	0	14
Bridgend Town Council	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
Cefn Cribwr Community Council	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Coity Higher Community Council	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cornelly Community Council	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Coychurch Higher Community Council	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Coychurch Lower Community Council	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Garw Valley Community Council	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Laleston Community Council	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Llangynwyd Lower Community Council	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Llangynwyd Middle Community Council	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Maesteg Town Council	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	4
Merthyr Mawr Community Council	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Newcastle Higher Community Council	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ogmore Valley Community Council	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1

Pencoed Town Council	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Porthcawl Town Council	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
Pyle Community Council	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
St Brides Minor Community Council	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ynysawdre Community Council	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0