

Nick Bennett
Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

5 December 2016

Dear Nick

Thank you for attending the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee meeting on 23 November to give evidence in connection with your Annual Report 2015–16.

Following the meeting, the Committee agreed that I should write to you on a number of issues that were not reached during the session and to request further information on some of the issues discussed.

In your report and evidence, you told us that you had established ‘sounding boards’ as a means of engaging with stakeholders and organisations about your service. **We would like details from you on how you expect the outcomes of these sounding boards to impact on your work.**

We were interested to hear that, during the reporting year, you have reviewed and revised your own complaints policy and procedure and have subsequently appointed an independent external reviewer of complaints. **We would like further details from you on the role of the reviewer and on the process for referral of complaints for review. We would also like you to outline how you expect the work**



of the reviewer to impact on the way in which complaints about your service are handled.

We note that the number of Code of Conduct complaints has increased by 19 per cent since the last reporting year and that while complaints against members of county and county borough councils had decreased, there had been a significant increase in complaints against members of community councils. We also note that approximately one third of all complaints against community councils related to three community councils.

When questioned about the increase in complaints relating to community councils, you suggested that “an awful lot” of these were vexatious complaints, which is of concern to us. We are particularly concerned about the resource implications for your office of dealing with vexatious complaints and the potential diversion of resources from more serious investigations. You told us that you had powers available to you to address the issue of vexatious complaints but that, to date, you had chosen not to exercise them. **We would like further details from you on these powers. We would also like you to clarify the circumstances in which you would consider exercising them.**

During the session, a number of matters were raised relating to complaints against and governance of NHS bodies. I have written to the Chair of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee and to the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Well-being and Sport to draw their attention to these matters.



I look forward to receiving a response from you in due course.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John". The letter "J" is large and stylized, with a long horizontal stroke that extends to the right and then loops back down to form the letter "o". The "h" is written in a simple, cursive style.

John Griffiths AC / AM
Cadeirydd / Chair

