



**Ombwdsmon
Ombudsman**
Cymru · Wales

Ask for: Michelle Morris

Our ref: MAM/CV



Date: 24 January 2025



Peredur Owen Griffiths
Chair, Finance Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

By email only
seneddfinance@senedd.wales

Dear Peredur

Responses to Finance Committee's reports

I refer to the Committee's recent reports on its 'Review into the operations, processes and investigations carried out by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales' and its 'Annual Scrutiny of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales'.

I am pleased to attach my responses to the recommendations in each report.

Yours sincerely

M.A. Morris.

Michelle Morris
Public Services Ombudsman

Encl.

ombwdsmon.cymru
holwch@ombwdsmon.cymru
0300 790 0203
1 Ffordd yr Hen Gae, CF 35 5LJ
Rydym yn hapus i dderbyn ac
ymateb i ohebiaeth yn y Gymraeg.

ombudsman.wales
ask@ombudsman.wales
0300 790 0203
1 Ffordd yr Hen Gae, CF 35 5LJ
We are happy to accept and respond
to correspondence in Welsh.



Response to Finance Committee's 'Review into the operations, processes and investigations carried out by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales'

I refer to the Committee's recent report on its **Review into the operations, processes and investigations carried out by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales**. As the Committee's report notes, this has been a very difficult time for the office and for our staff and we have worked to support staff and prioritise their wellbeing during this period.

We welcome the Committee's conclusions that we have engaged transparently with the Independent Review and with the Committee, and that we are responding positively to the Independent Review's recommendations and lessons learnt.

We recognise that independence, impartiality, fairness and openness are fundamental principles underpinning our work, and we particularly welcome the conclusion that the Committee has confidence that the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales is able to undertake its work with impartiality and fairness.

The Committee's report is positive and constructive, and all the recommendations are agreed. I respond below to each of the report's recommendations.

Recommendation 1. The Committee recommends the Ombudsman provides a formal response to our report and recommendations as well as regular updates, including updates in its Annual Reports, to the Committee on progress thereafter in implementing the recommendations and lessons learned identified in the Independent Review.

Response: Agreed. In this letter I am responding formally to the report and to each recommendation. Progress in implementing the recommendations of the Independent Review and those made by the Committee will be reported to, and monitored by, my Audit & Risk Assurance Committee. I will provide further updates to the Committee, following the end of the financial year, and will also include updates in my Annual Report & Accounts.

Recommendation 2. The Committee recommends the Ombudsman considers introducing a new key performance indicator based on a sample of decisions made by Investigating Officers and Code Team Managers undergoing additional checks.

Response: Agreed. From 2025/26 we will include a new indicator, published alongside other key performance indicators in the Annual Report, that reflects the sample of Code of Conduct case decisions made by Investigation Officers or the Code Team Manager that are subject to additional checks.

Recommendation 3. The Committee recommends that the Ombudsman provides an update as to whether any follow-up work would be conducted following the Independent Review, including any associated financial and resource implications.

Response: Agreed. Dr Melissa McCullough, who undertook the Independent Review, will undertake a follow-up review, in the first quarter of the 2025/26 financial year, looking at our progress in implementing the recommendations of the Independent Review. This is not expected to be a substantial piece of work in terms of financial and resource implications. I can provide further detail of resource implications in due course.

Recommendation 4. The Committee recommends that the Ombudsman provides updates to the Committee on how it is monitoring staff compliance in respect of its social media policy.

Response: As discussed during the Committee's evidence session in October, our approach is to:

- *Review and strengthen our internal policies on social media use;*
- *Provide staff briefings to explain the requirements and expectations, and give guidance to staff on how to comply;*
- *Provide annual reminder briefings to staff.*

We recognise the rights of staff to a private life and we need to trust our staff to act appropriately, so we will not be undertaking proactive monitoring of staff social media activity. If it appears that a member of staff may not have followed the requirements of the policy, this would be considered in accordance with the Disciplinary Policy.

We have also reviewed our recruitment processes and now make clear, at application stage, that PSOW staff are subject to restrictions on their political activity and are required to comply with our policy on social media use. We now also require the proposed appointee to disclose their social media accounts and we arrange, with a third party, scrutiny of those accounts, prior to appointment, to identify any concerns or issues.