

Dai Lloyd AM
Chair, Health, Social Care and Sport Committee

5 December 2016

Dear Dai

At our meeting on 23 November, the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee (the Committee) took evidence from the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales (the Ombudsman) in connection with his Annual Report 2015–16.

During the session, a number of matters were raised relating to NHS bodies and the provision of health services. Given that these matters fall within the remit of the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, Members agreed that I should write to you to draw them to your attention. I have written in similar terms to the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Well-being and Sport.

Increase in health complaints

Following correspondence from Simon Thomas AM, Chair of Finance Committee raising concerns about the increase in complaints against NHS bodies and the subsequent burden on the NHS of dealing with complaints, we questioned the Ombudsman on this matter. The Ombudsman reported that there had been a notable increase in complaints against two health boards, namely Abertawe Bro



Morgannwg University Health Board (UHB) and Betsi Cadwaladr UHB, which he believed could explain the overall increase in complaints against NHS bodies. He also reported that complaints against NHS bodies in other parts of Wales were reducing.

The Ombudsman suggested that recent high profile complaints against these UHBs meant that individuals were more prepared to complain than would otherwise be the case. He told us that both Abertawe Bro Morgannwg UHB and Betsi Cadwaladr UHB had been assigned an improvement officer to improve complaint handling and to help ensure that improvements occur in those areas of service delivery where failings have been identified. He also told us that five out of seven health boards have been assigned an improvement officer.

Governance and accountability

A key theme emerging from the Ombudsman's evidence was the need to ensure good leadership and governance across health boards and to develop a culture in which complaints are viewed as an opportunity for continuous improvement in services. Linked to this, the Ombudsman highlighted the importance of effective scrutiny of health boards and suggested that further clarity was needed on scrutiny arrangements.


Out-of-hours care

The Ombudsman told us that, during the reporting year, he had published his first thematic report, *Out-of-hours: Time to care*, which highlighted a number of cases investigated that showed inadequate standards of care given to patients in hospitals outside of normal working hours. He also told us that he was awaiting a response from the Welsh Government to the report and would be meeting with the Deputy Chief Medical Officer shortly to discuss potential actions arising from it.



I should be grateful if you would consider following up the above matters with the Cabinet Secretary at an appropriate time.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John". The first letter 'J' is large and stylized, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

John Griffiths AC / AM
Cadeirydd / Chair

