

PSOW 07

**Bil Ombwdsmon Gwasanaethau Cyhoeddus (Cymru) Public Services
Ombudsman (Wales) Bill**

**Ymateb gan: Blaenau Gwent Cyngor Bwrdeisdref Sirol Response from:
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council**

1 ACCEPTING ORAL COMPLAINTS

- 1.1 This will be an improvement in the service provided by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales as the present system may exclude those complainants who have difficulties submitting a written complaint and do not have assistance in helping them to put forward their complaints. The service will be more inclusive.
- 1.2 The drawback to accepting oral complaints is that more may be made on the “spur of the moment”, and this may result in an increase in complaints being made but then not pursued. The details of the complaint will need to be recorded in writing by a third party who will then have to check that the issues have been captured correctly. It may also lead to increased work to public bodies who first have to check if the complaints have been processed through their internal complaints procedures.

2 UNDERTAKING OWN INITIATIVE INVESTIGATIONS

- 2.1 This proposal is welcomed, as it will give The Public Services Ombudsman powers to undertake investigations where there is systemic failure, and this can only be of benefit to service users. It is noted in the bill that this additional power would only be used where there is sufficient evidence to undertake an own initiative investigation.

3 INVESTIGATE PRIVATE MEDICAL TREATMENT INCLUDING NURSING CARE IN A PUBLIC / PRIVATE HEALTH PATHWAY

- 3.1 This additional power to investigate private health care will also result in fewer delays to service users whereby service users do not have to make separate complaints to the public and private body, and will make private health care more responsible.

4 UNDERTAKE A ROLE IN RELATION TO COMPLAINTS HANDLING STANDARDS AND PROCEDURES

- 4.1 It will be advantageous to service users if there is a standard complaints

procedure which must be adopted by public bodies and which is easy to understand and use. However by encouraging bodies such as Councils to use the model complaints procedure this has gained corporate ownership, rather than by directing its use.

- 4.2 It should be noted that some smaller Councils do not have sufficient resources to have complaints officers whose sole task is to take and log complaints, but it is often an “add on” to an officer’s main role. There will be an indirect staffing cost to public bodies in providing additional data to the Ombudsman and updating software systems. This is an added financial and staffing requirement at a time when Council budgets are under severe pressure.
- 4.3 It is therefore essential that any data collection is kept to a minimum, but in particular that the data collected is useful in driving service improvement and is not just a benchmarking exercise which does not necessarily demonstrate the effectiveness of complaints handling or improving service outcomes within an organisation.