

<b>CYNGOR SIR YNYS MON / ISLE OF ANGLESEY COUNTY COUNCIL</b>	
<b>COMMITTEE:</b>	<b>Standards Committee</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>6 February 2025</b>
<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales' independent review report: "Independent review of investigations by the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales' decision making to be appropriate, fair and free from political bias"</b>
<b>PURPOSE OF THE REPORT:</b>	<b>To inform the Standards Committee of the report produced following the PSOW's independent review</b>
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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 In March 2024, the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales ("PSOW") received a substantiated complaint that a member of staff had been making inappropriate and unacceptable social media posts of a political nature. There were a number of social media posts of a political nature made by the individual. Media coverage followed, and concerns were raised about the PSOW's guiding principles of impartiality and independence.
- 1.2 In response, the PSOW commissioned an independent review to assess whether the PSOW's Code Team processes, delegations and decisions in relation to the assessment and investigation of complaints by the Code Team and the previous employee had been sound, free from political bias and to ensure that lessons are learned from what had happened (the "**Review**").

## **2. THE REVIEW**

- 2.1 Dr Melissa McCullough was appointed to lead the Review, and the report of the findings of the Review was published on 27 September 2024 on the [PSOW's website](#). The full report can be accessed [here](#).

- 2.2 The Review involved the examination of various documentation relating to the Code Team processes and delegations, and included the undertaking of staff interviews. The Review also examined 673 cases where decisions not to investigate were taken plus 11 discontinued investigations, which in total accounted for the Code Team decision-making either directly by the former employee or decision-making for which the former employee had oversight.

### **3. FINDINGS FROM THE REVIEW**

#### 3.1 The Review concluded that:

3.1.1 The PSOW's Code of Conduct processes and delegations are robust, in terms of safeguarding, fairness and impartiality. The Review found that the processes and delegations are systematic, well documented and supplemented with appropriate guidance and the reasoning for decisions is required to be recorded and explained, as applicable. Furthermore, it was noted that decisions are required to be recorded and explained.

3.1.2 All decision-making is based solely on evidence, facts, and solid, well-articulated reasoning and, as such, there was no evidence of political bias. The Review found no evidence that the decision-making on any of the cases reviewed was influenced by any political affiliation of the person who made the complaint and/or the member who was complained about.

3.1.3 There was no evidence that the former manager expressed her personal views on political matters "akin to her social media posts" in the office and/or inappropriately influenced any other staff members, in the performance of their duties under the Local Government Act 2000

#### 3.2 The conclusions of the Review are summarised on page 28 of the report

*"...The PSOW is built on the principles of independence, impartiality, fairness and inclusivity. These principles must be reflected in the important work carried out by the PSOW in order to maintain public trust in its operations. This necessarily means that the assessments carried out by investigation officers who work for the PSOW should demonstrate a consistent application of a well-defined and fair process as well as excellent analysis and reasoning to ensure that their decision-making is patently impartial and non-biased. The findings of this review point towards such excellence, in both processing and complaint*

*assessment. This should provide reassurance to the public that they can trust and have confidence in the work of the PSOW and its Code Team”.*

3.3 Recommendations (7) are also made to improve the current safeguards for ensuring fairness and impartiality. Lessons (6) are identified to lessen the risk of similar matters happening again in the future. These are detailed on pages 25-27 of the report.

#### **4. PSOW’S RESPONSE**

4.1 The PSOW confirmed here that it *“welcomes this report and the confirmation that decision making, in respect of Code of Conduct complaints, is free from political bias”.*

4.2 The PSOW further noted that all recommendations made were accepted and the lessons learnt would be used moving forward.

#### **5. RECOMMENDATION**

5.1 To note the content of the Review.

5.2 The Chair of the Standards Committee will lead a discussion on any matters of interest arising from the Review.