

Llais Response to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales Strategic Plan 2026–2029

About Llais

Llais is the independent body that reflects the views and represents the interests of people living in Wales in their National Health Service (NHS) and social care services.

We operate locally, regionally, and nationally. We work with people and communities in all parts of Wales so that everyone's voice can be heard, and used, to drive the planning, design, development and delivery of health and social care services for everyone. We:

- reach out to hear from people within our local communities through an ongoing programme of engagement activities. We do this so that people know about and understand what we do, and to gather their views and experiences of NHS and social care services. We do this in lots of ways, face to face and digitally, including visiting places where people are receiving health and social care services
- use what we hear to help health and social care services better understand how those of us who may need, and use services think services are meeting their needs, in the way that matters most to them. We help make sure the NHS and social care services takes action to make things better where this is needed.

This includes working with health and social care services leaders when they are thinking about making changes to the way services are delivered, so that people and communities have their say from the start

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- provide a complaints advocacy service that is free, independent and confidential to help people to raise their concerns about health and social services

We have operated in Wales since 1 April 2023. Our response reflects what we have heard directly and through others, particularly from people:

- who have engaged with us at regional and national events.
- who have used our complaints advocacy service to raise a concern about their experience.

Our understanding is also guided by the [People's Principles](#), developed by Llais following a national conversation involving thousands of people in Wales.

Ambition

The ambition is clear, appropriate and will encourage fairness, learning and accountability.

We agree with the strong emphasis on people feeling heard and treated fairly, which aligns closely with the People's Principles and the experiences people share with Llais across Wales.

Many of them tell us that they want processes that feel humane, transparent and respectful, not just procedural.

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Areas of focus

Yes, the areas identified are accurate.

Stronger alignment could be achieved by explicitly referencing the Listening to People (LTP) reforms, which reshape the experience of people raising complaints across NHS Wales.

These reforms position the Public Services Ombudsman Wales and Llais as key partners in ensuring that complaint systems deliver clear communication, timeliness, accessibility and fairness.

It may also be useful for the Plan to articulate how the Public Services Ombudsman Wales will use citizen-voice evidence - including Llais' insights and lived-experience feedback - as part of its ongoing learning.

People often tell us they find multi-stage complaints confusing and stressful, so using this insight in the Plan would make it stronger.

Strategic Aim 1

The aim is reasonable and aligned with PSOW principles. Consistency, clarity and compliance monitoring remain important. The increasing complexity and demand within complaint systems emphasises the need for clear communication and transparency about expected timeframes.

People routinely tell Llais that uncertainty about complaint progress is one of the most stressful aspects of the process. They want honest updates, clear information about next steps and realistic expectations.

This is in line with the People's Principles of clear and honest communication and timely care and support while waiting. Including

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explicit commitments to publish and report against timeframes would strengthen public confidence.

Strategic Aim 2

The expansion of Complaints Standards, own-initiative investigations and improved impact capture are welcome.

However, waiting times for assessment and investigation continue to grow, and it is unclear how proposed expansions will affect timeliness, particularly for those already experiencing delays.

The Plan would also benefit from explicit reference to the significant impact of LTP reforms and the confirmed oversight role of both PSOW and Llais in relation to complainant experience.

People who use our complaints advocacy service at Llais regularly express concerns about long waits. This is both before a complaint is accepted and during investigations.

This can cause further distress, particularly for those who have already experienced harm.

It would be helpful for the Plan to include specific actions to manage and reduce delays, and to explain how increased activity (e.g. OI investigations) will avoid unintended pressure on existing caseloads.

The Plan would also benefit from explicit reference to the significant impact of LTP reforms and the confirmed oversight role of both PSOW and Llais.

Being clear about how the Ombudsman will feed into learning across NHS complaints will help strengthen joined-up accountability.

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Strategic Aim 3

We support the focus on accessibility, especially for people who are digitally excluded or face communication barriers.

Accessibility more broadly requires further strengthening across services within the Ombudsman's remit, including barriers relating to literacy and the difficulty some people may have in understanding or processing complex information.

People often tell Llais that complaints processes feel overwhelming or overly technical; plain-language information, multi-format guidance and proactive communication would make a big difference.

With LTP requiring the NHS to address barriers to full participation, the PSOW's oversight role positions it well to reinforce and influence consistent progress in this area.

We agree with the commitments to people being able to make complaints verbally. Llais hears regularly from people who, due to literacy challenges, language needs, cognitive impairments or distress, cannot navigate written processes. This can mean they struggle to exercise their rights. Strengthening support for these groups would help to make sure there is genuinely inclusive and fair access.

Strategic Aim 4

The focus on governance, data, responsible technology and workforce resilience is appropriate. As PSOW expands its use of data and AI tools, safeguards should make sure that vulnerable or digitally excluded complainants are not disadvantaged, with transparent human oversight retained.

Many people tell us they worry about fairness and bias in automated or digital tools. Clear public explanation of how decisions are made,

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and reassurance that technology will not replace human judgement, will be essential.

Co-producing guidance on digital fairness with people who face access barriers would be a meaningful step.

Impact measurement

Useful indicators include recurrence reduction, evidence of implementation, complainant experience measures, and thematic learning.

Additional indicators could include:

equity of access across groups and languages

timeliness and waiting-time transparency

ease of understanding the process

satisfaction among groups who are seldom heard or experience additional barriers (e.g. digital exclusion, communication needs)

Transparency regarding expected timeframes and delays would also strengthen public confidence.

Welsh language – effects

The Plan should have positive effects by strengthening Welsh-language provision and supporting parity across languages.

Welsh language – increasing positive effects

Positive effects could be increased through consistent active offer practices and expansion of plain-language bilingual resources.

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People tell Llais that parity of experience, not just availability, is crucial. This includes timeliness, confidence of staff, digital tools that work fully in Welsh, and avoiding situations where Welsh-language cases are delayed or redirected.

Welsh language – reducing adverse effects

Adverse effects can be reduced by ensuring parity of timeliness, accessibility and user experience across Welsh and English channels.

We also recommend explicit commitments to improving the Welsh-language capability of digital systems, and to co-producing Welsh-medium materials with communities to ensure cultural and linguistic authenticity.

Any other comments

Given the scale of LTP reforms and the formal oversight responsibilities of PSOW and Llais, explicitly referencing LTP would improve clarity for the public.

We also recommend:

- clear information on how Public Services Ombudsman Wales will work with Llais and others to share insight, reduce duplication and enhance system learning
- publication of accessible annual summaries showing where Ombudsman decisions have driven real change strengthening engagement with seldom-heard communities to better understand barriers to raising complaints

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- exploring co-designed improvements to the complaints journey with people who have lived experience, particularly those who found the process daunting or inaccessible

Llais is keen to continue working constructively with PSOW within our statutory roles.

27th March 2026