

This Factsheet is about complaints relating to Community and Town Councils. It should be read together with our general information leaflet about our service. You may also wish to read our additional Factsheets covering a range of specific public service areas.

There are 735 Community and Town Councils in Wales representing the tier of government closest to the people. The communities served by these Councils range from small rural settlements to large towns, and each Council's budget varies accordingly. However, all Councils have common aims to serve their communities and improve the quality of life in their locality.

Community and Town Councils are responsible to their local electorates for delivering a wide range of services and for the provision and upkeep of local amenities. Each Council is made up of elected members, or, in some cases, co-opted members.

Community and Town Councils operate in accordance with statutory powers and duties. Each council's decision-making procedures are often governed by its own series of standing orders; copies of these can be obtained from the Clerk to the Council.

What the Ombudsman can do

If you think that a decision taken by a Community or Town Council is flawed, the Ombudsman may be able to help you. In view of the extensive range of community functions performed by Community and Town Councils, the types of complaints received by the Ombudsman in relation to these Councils can be wide-ranging.

Some examples of the types of complaints the Ombudsman may consider are as follows:

- decisions or actions taken by the Council in relation the services it provides;
- procedures adopted by each Council at its meetings;
- recruitment practices adopted;
- decisions that have come to light following the disclosure of information under Access to Information legislation such as the Freedom of Information Act.

The Ombudsman will only investigate a complaint where an individual (or, in some cases, a group of individuals) has suffered personal injustice or hardship because of the action or lack of action on behalf of the Community or Town Council. The complaint must be brought by the person who has suffered this injustice, hardship or loss (or their representative).

What the Ombudsman cannot do

The Ombudsman cannot:

- change a properly-made decision taken by a Council;
- normally look at a complaint where there is, or was, a right of appeal available;
- normally look at a complaint where there is a legal remedy available.

Issues to bear in mind

- Complaints which relate to the conduct of individual members of a Community or Town Council are considered under a different process. Please refer to our Code of Conduct Factsheet for further information.
- Complaints which relate to decisions or actions taken by a Community or Town Council should always be raised initially with the Clerk to the Council. A copy of a Council's complaints policy should be available on each Council's website or from the Clerk.
- You do not need to make your complaint to the Ombudsman using a solicitor or any other advocate.

Further information

You can get free, independent legal advice about the provision of services by your Council from your local Citizens Advice Bureau: www.citizensadvice.org.uk .

Your Council's own website may also contain information about the provision of services in your local area and procedures. Alternatively, you can contact the Clerk to the Council.

Information concerning Community and Town Councils may also be obtained from One Voice Wales, the organisation that represents and provides support services to Community and Town Councils in Wales: www.onevoicewales.org.uk .

The Ombudsman is independent and impartial; he cannot order public bodies to do what he recommends – but, in practice, they almost always do. Examples of cases that the Ombudsman has looked at can be found on our website: www.ombudsman-wales.org.uk .

If you are unsure whether the Ombudsman would be able to look into your complaint, please contact us:

- **phone** 0845 601 0987;
- **e-mail** ask@ombudsman-wales.org.uk;
- **visit the website at** www.ombudsman-wales.org.uk;
- **write to:** The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales
1 Ffordd yr Hen Gae, Pencoed CF35 5LJ