

Dear Colleague,

The Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales (the Commission) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee's inquiry into the general principles of the Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Bill.

The Commission considered the Bill and Explanatory Memorandum at its October 2017 meeting. The Commission had previously given evidence to the Finance Committee's inquiry on the same subject in 2015 where we commented on the provision to accept oral complaints. We, therefore, reiterate our previous response to the Finance Committee and make an additional point in respect the investigation of complaints handling standards.

Whilst the Commission considers it appropriate to expand the category of written evidence to include e-mails and online forms, we are of the view that there are difficulties when it comes to oral evidence. We consider that in order to ensure oral evidence accurately reflects the views of the complainant there needs to be some form of transcription or recording of the conversation. This will require additional resources. A complaint made orally by telephone or face to face may lack structure and accuracy and may lead to a misunderstanding of the nature of the complaint. In order to mitigate against this risk it will always require the additional step of setting the complaint out in writing and going back to the complainant to read this out for them to agree it. We consider that for those wishing to make a complaint, but are not confident in making it in writing, there is assistance available for them in the wider community.

The Commission does have some concerns in respect of the proposal to give the power to undertake a role in relation to complaints handling standards and procedures. In order to consider this matter fully and in order to assess how it may impact on the work of the Commission we would wish to have a better understanding of the proposals for the investigation of standards. There is a concern that proposals in this respect may impose additional burdens, particularly on small organisations such as the Commission.

Yours Sincerely



Owen Watkin
Chair
Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales