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Ms Jo Whitehead
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Sent via email, no hard copy to follow

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Dear Jo

Correspondence to Audit Wales regarding the reporting of Public Service Ombudsman complaints within Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board

As you are probably aware Audit Wales has received correspondence from a member of the public relating to inaccuracies in the Health Board's reporting of complaints to the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales (PSOW) relating to Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board. The correspondence raised concerns that the number of complaints to the PSOW being reported within both the Health Board's recent Putting Things Right reports and its 2020-21 Annual Report was lower than the numbers reported by the PSOW in their own annual letters.

We are grateful to Matt Joyes for working with Audit Wales staff to help us look into the issues raised in the correspondence. We have also spoken to the PSOW's office and undertaken a slightly wider analysis of reporting of PSOW complaints within the Health Board.

Our findings can be summarised as follows:

Reporting of PSOW complaints in the Health Board’s *Putting Things Right* annual reports: For the years 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20 the number of complaints received by the PSOW relating to the Health Board was **under-reported** when compared to the figures published by the PSOW themselves. We understand that the Health Board did not produce a Putting Things Right annual report for 2020-21.

Reporting of PSOW complaints in the Health Board’s Annual Report: Complaints received by the PSOW in relation to the Health Board were captured in the Health Board’s Annual Report for the first time in 2020-21. Within that report the number of complaints received by the PSOW relating to the Health Board was **under-reported** in comparison to the figures published by the PSOW themselves.

Reporting of PSOW complaints to the Health Board’s Quality Safety & Experience Committee: As the Committee receives a copy of the PSOW’s annual letter each year, they are sighted of what the PSOW publishes in respect of complaints relating to the Health Board. Typically, the committee received these letters between September and November each year. We did notice, however, that there were inaccuracies in the cover papers that accompanied these letters for the years 2018-19 and 2020-21 which resulted in an **over-stating** of the numbers of complaints the PSOW received within the cover papers.

The numbers relating to the above findings are summarised in the table below.

Year	Ombudsman reported complaints relating to BCU HB	BCU HB Putting Things Right Reported numbers	BCU Annual Report	Reports to the Health Board’s Quality Safety and Experience Committee
2017-18	186 (updated to 194 in 2018-19 letter)	146		186
2018-19	186	137		194 (in cover paper narrative) but also includes the PSOW letter with a value of 186
2019-20	227	166		227
2020-21	184	No Putting Things Right Annual Report published	122	194 (in cover paper narrative) but also includes the PSOW letter with a value of and 184

We have sought to determine the reasons behind the above discrepancies, and have found the following:

- In compiling PSOW complaint figures for its Putting Things Right and Annual Reports the Health Board has drawn information from the Datix system. However, the Health Board only records the complaints on Datix where the Ombudsman's office has contacted the Health Board during the course of the year. As a result, Datix excludes complaints where the PSOW has received a complaint but decided that it does not warrant further investigation and therefore has not contacted the Health Board.
- The inaccurate referencing of complaint numbers in the cover papers for the Quality, Safety and Experience Committee appears to be down to simple administrative errors.

As a result of the above we are satisfied that there has been no deliberate under-reporting by the Health Board of the number of complaints received by the PSOW. However, there is an obvious need to strengthen the arrangements that underpin the Health Board's annual reporting in respect of these figures, with some relatively simple solutions to achieve that.

The PSOW's office has indicated that the total numbers of complaints it has received during the year are available shortly after financial year end, even though the PSOW will not formally report these until later on in the year. Before finalising any annual report that refers PSOW complaint numbers, the Health Board should therefore put in place arrangements to engage with the PSOW to verify the number of complaints they have received relating to BCU, and thereby ensure the Health Board is reporting accurate figures.

In our discussions with Matt Joyes we have stressed the need to ensure such verification takes place fairly urgently to ensure the figures reported in the Health Board's 2021-22 Annual Report are accurate. There is also an opportunity to use that report to publish a correction to the figure that was quoted in the previous year's report in respect of complaints received by the PSOW.

Of course, the wider point here is that the Health Board, through its on-going improvement actions, needs to ensure that there are appropriate arrangements in place to support positive responses to, and organisational learning from complaints and concerns, such that services are of sufficient quality to minimise the need for members of the public to raise complaints in the first place.

We'll be keeping the issues I've raised here under review as part of our upcoming Structured Assessment work but would welcome any immediate observations yourself or Matt had on the issues we've flagged.

Given the wider circulation of the correspondence on this matter, I am copying this letter to the PSOW and relevant colleagues in Healthcare Inspectorate Wales and the Welsh Government.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Thomas', written in a cursive style.

David Thomas
Audit Director

Cc Michelle Morris, Public Service Ombudsman for Wales
Alun Jones, Interim Chief Executive, Healthcare Inspectorate Wales
Olivia Shorrocks, Welsh Government
Matthew Joyes, Associate Director of Quality
Molly Marcu, Interim Board Secretary