

# **How to Resolve Complaints from Persistent and Complicated Service Users**

**Nick Bennett**

**Public Services Ombudsman for Wales**

# Who I am & what I do?

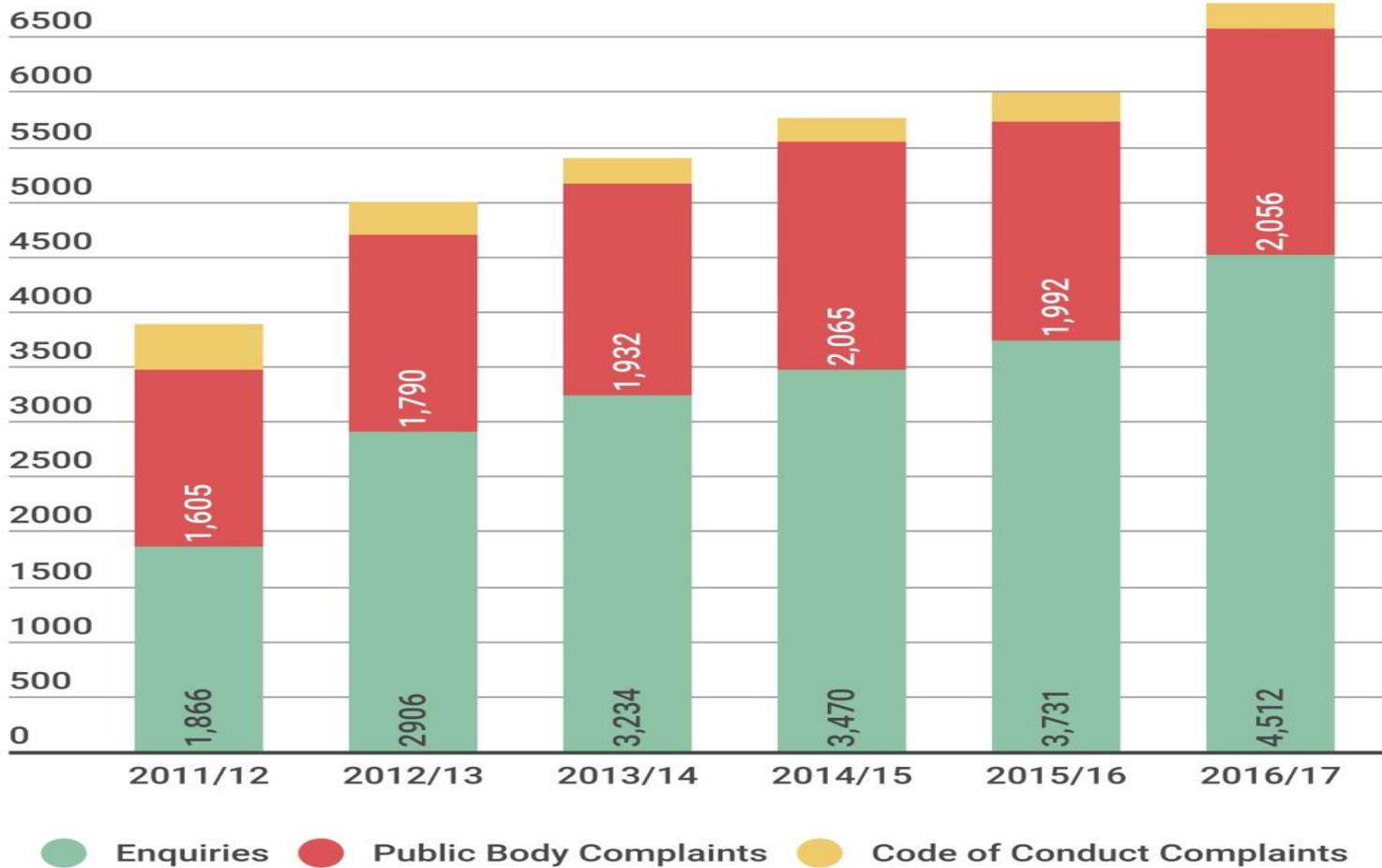
- The office was established in April 2006 by the PSOW Act 2005
- Two specific roles:
  - Complaints about public services providers in Wales;
  - Complaints that members of local authorities have broken the Code of Conduct

Discretion for early consideration – not necessarily because the complainant is “difficult”

# Who I am & what I do?

- In general terms, consider complaints about services devolved to Wales:
  - Local government (both county & community councils);
  - The National Health Service (including GPs & dentists);
  - Registered Social Landlords (Housing Associations); and
  - The Welsh Government, together with its sponsored bodies.
- Since 1 November 2014, also privately arranged or funded social care & palliative care services.
- New powers on their way?

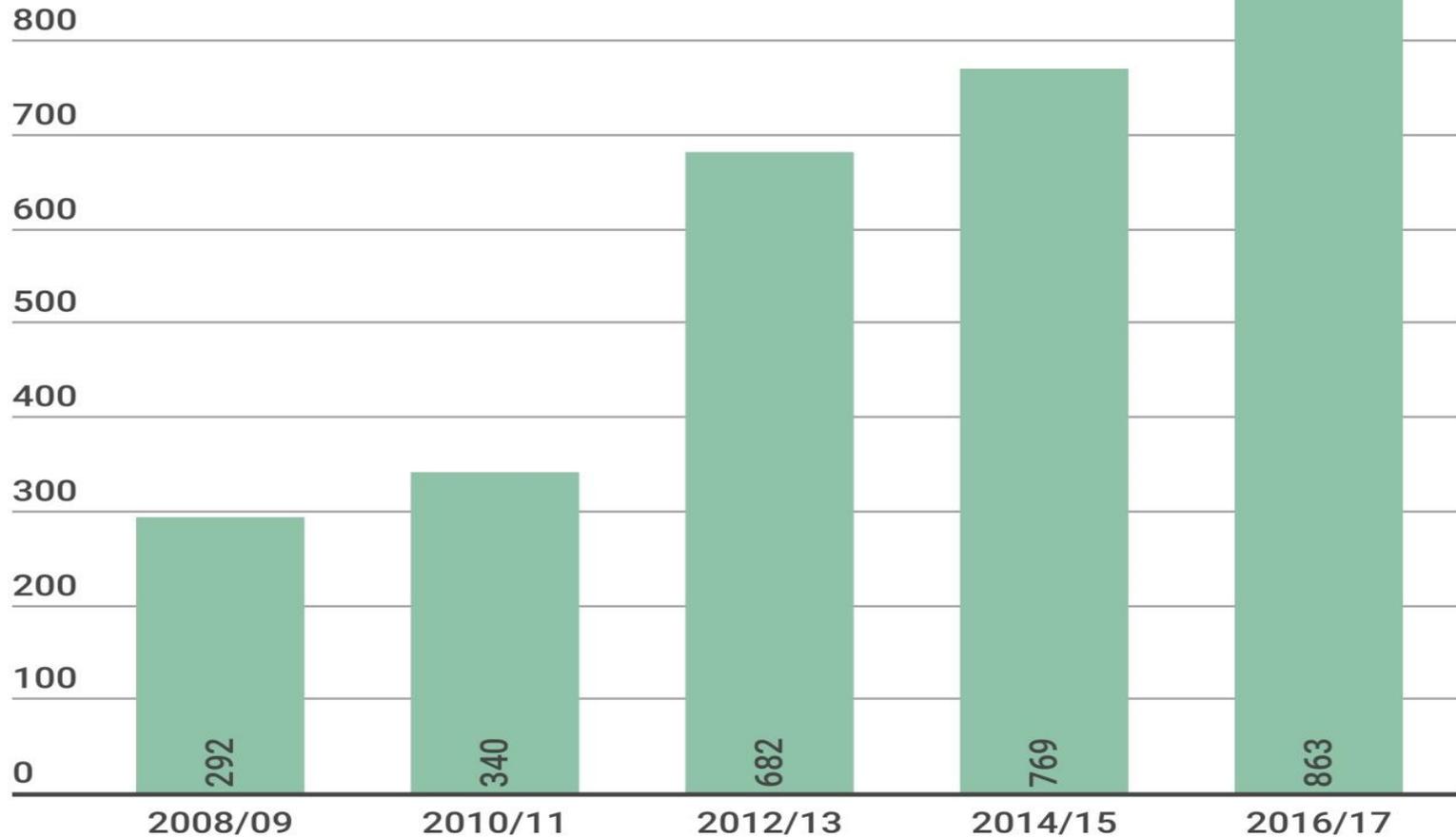
# Trends – Enquiries and Complaints



Investigating Complaints

Improving Services

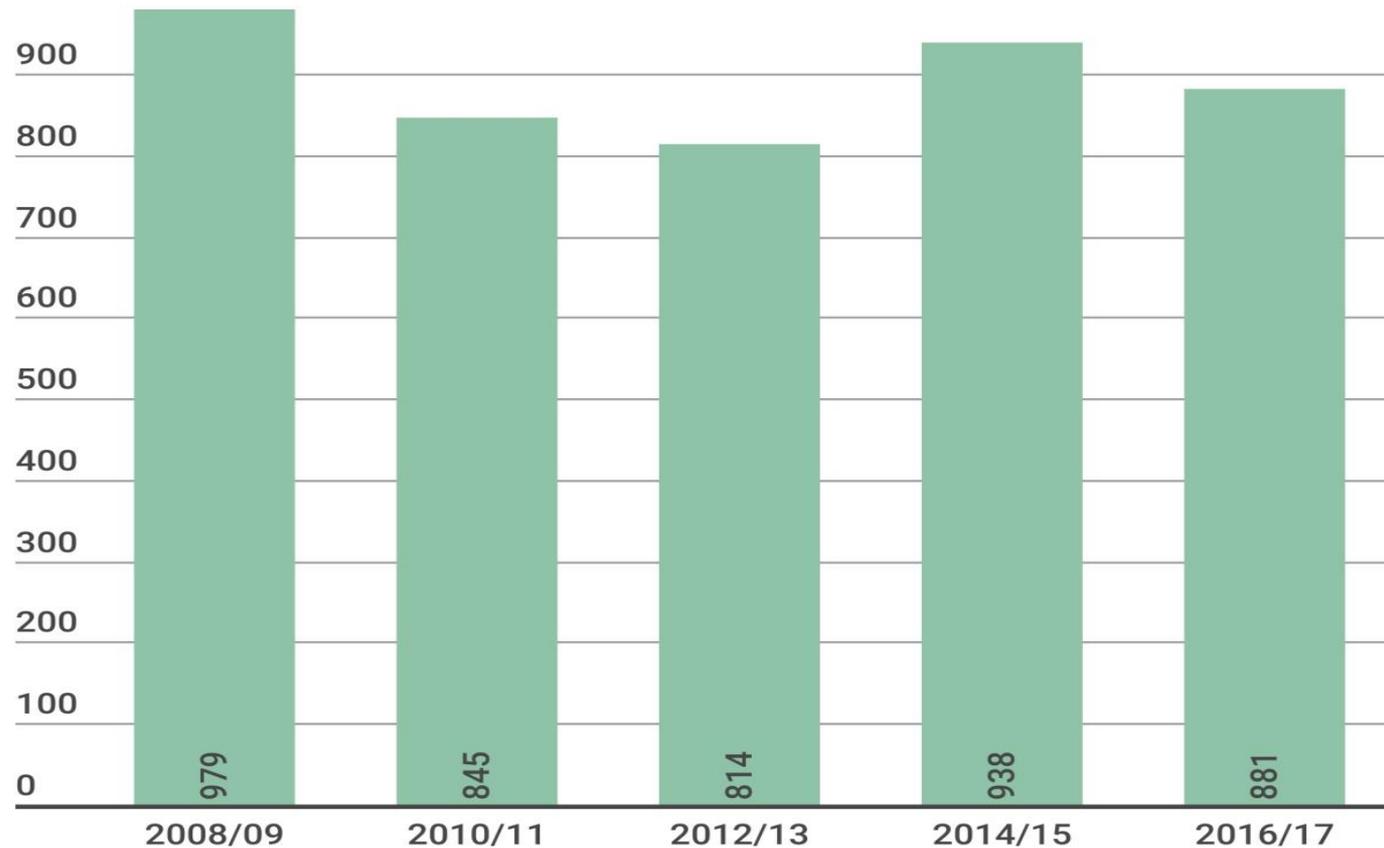
# Trends –Health Body Complaints



Investigating Complaints

Improving Services

# Trends- County Borough Council Complaints



Investigating Complaints

Improving Services

# PSOW 2016/17

## COMPLAINTS ABOUT PUBLIC BODIES BY SUBJECT

2016/17

HEALTH



38%

HOUSING



13%

SOCIAL SERVICES



9%

PLANNING  
AND BUILDING  
CONTROL



8%

COMPLAINT  
HANDLING



7%

# Sir Idwal Pugh!



Investigating Complaints

Improving Services

# Implications

- Improvement – stemming complaint flows from “best customers” – organisations not the complainants!
- Innovation and efficiency
- Greater use of early resolution
- Cultural development – for us and bodies in jurisdiction

# Culture Eats Strategy for Breakfast

- “A balanced blend of human psychology, attitudes, actions, and beliefs that combined create either pleasure or pain, serious momentum or miserable stagnation.”
- “Culture is the environment in which your strategy and your brand thrives or dies a slow death.” Shawn Parr, Guvner & CEO of Bulldog Drummond

# Culture

## Front line staff

- Informal engagement at point of service delivery – avoid escalation!
- Empowerment - deal with complaints as they arise – aim to resolve ‘on the spot’.

## Governance - Top Down and Bottom Up

- Ownership by, and leadership from, the Board & Executive.
- Ensure that a complaints culture exists. Take hold of the learning & ensure things are put right.

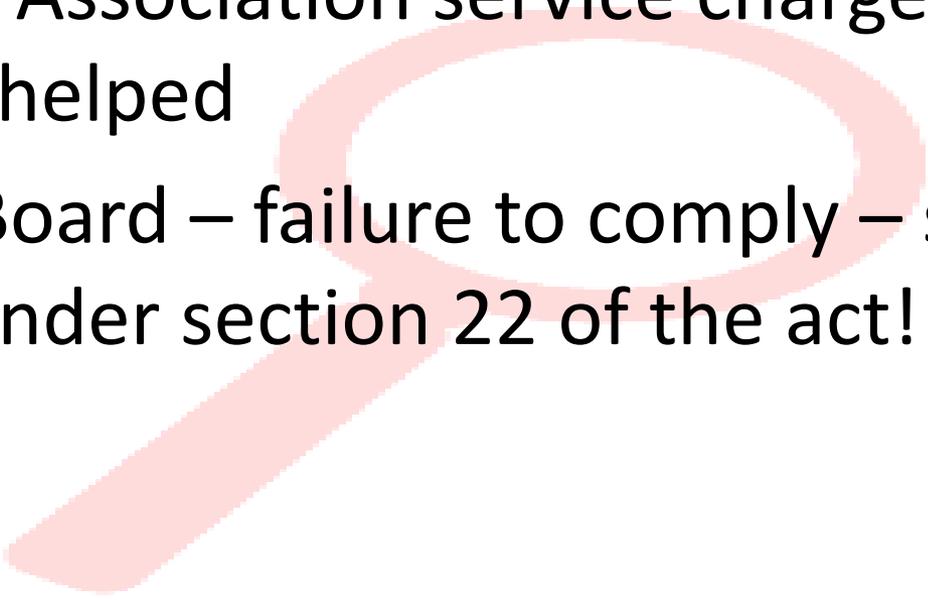
# PSOW 2016/17

Complaint about a Public Body	2016/17	2015/16
Closed after initial consideration	1570	1488
Complaint withdrawn	0	41
Complaint settled voluntarily	287	227
Investigation discontinued	16	19
Investigation: complaint not upheld	66	105
Investigation: complaint upheld in whole or in part	168	163
Investigation: complaint upheld in whole or in part – public interest report	6	7
Investigation: complaint upheld in whole or in part – public interest report (\$22)	1	0
<b>Total outcomes</b>	<b>2114</b>	<b>2050</b>

Investigating Complaints

Improving Services

# Examples of Early Resolution

- “Quick Fixes”
  - Housing Association service charges. 50 tenants helped
  - Health Board – failure to comply – special report under section 22 of the act!
- 

# Examples of Early Referral

- Mr C – Social Services. Rang my office 220 times in 24 hours. Oral complaint – would not sign – we still investigated additional complaint.
- Mr P – Placement at college at risk. Vulnerable young man. Urgent.
- Also helped identify problem authority!

# The Future

## Standards Complaints Authority

- Although in Wales many have adopted the relevant complaints procedures, queries over to what degree they are being implemented effectively.
- Data: ensuring common approach to data gathering allows insight in relation to trends and patterns across public service delivery in Wales.

# Other aspects of new PSOW Bill

- Own initiative
- Private Healthcare
- Oral Complaints

