

STRICTLY EMBARGOED UNTIL:

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SHARP INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS AGAINST SENEDD MEMBERS IN LATEST STANDARDS COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

The number of complaints against Senedd Members in 2023-24 increased by 167% compared with the previous year according to the annual report of the Senedd Commissioner for Standards which was published today.

A total 190 complaints were received, compared with only 71 in 2022-23 and is the second highest number of complaints in the past five years.

Of the complaints received between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024, 53 were about conduct on social media, 17 were about the standard of service provided by Members, 29 were about conduct in plenary or Ministerial conduct and 24 were about failure to register or declare an interest. Almost all of these were about registration a few days outside the permitted four-week period.

The remaining 67 complaints were about a wide range of matters including Welsh Government policy and other matters not within the Commissioner's remit.

The increase can be explained in part by the fact two Senedd Members were subject to 58 complaints and one member of the public made 26 complaints.

The number of inadmissible complaints, 159, was also the highest in the last four years, with insufficient supporting evidence or being about conduct which, if proved, would not be a breach of the rules being the main reasons for inadmissibility.

However, whilst there is concern regarding these increased figures, the general conduct of Senedd Members remains at a high standard.

Other key issues highlighted in the report is the investigation into Rhys ap Owen, where he was found to have breached the Senedd's Code of Conduct which resulted in the Member being suspended from the Senedd for 42 days.

Thirty complaints were also received regarding the new 20mph default speed limit, mostly via social media with half of them opposing the new limit and the other half being supportive. Of these 30 complaints, 26 were inadmissible.

Senedd Commissioner for Standards, Douglas Bain said; **“Whilst the significant increase in the number of complaints may be a cause for concern, it also demonstrates there is greater public interest in scrutinising the work and conduct of Members of the Senedd.**

“Public scrutiny plays an important part in our democratic process and despite this increase I do not believe the number of complaints received indicates any reduction in the general high standard of conduct of Members of the Senedd.

“Despite awareness sessions, comments made by Members on social media remain by far the most common subject for complaints and I would urge them to take greater care when on social media.”

The main duty of the Commissioner is to investigate and report on complaints that a Member has broken the provisions of the Code of Conduct or certain other provisions. By law, the Commissioner is prohibited from giving information about any particular complaint.

The cost of running the Commissioner’s office depends principally on the number and complexity of complaints received and investigations undertaken. The 12% increase in expenditure in 2023-24 was due to these factors. Despite that increase, the running costs remain more than 16% less than the expenditure in 2020-21.

The report gives information on other work undertaken by the Commissioner and complaint related statistics for the last five years.

ENDS

Notes for Editors

1. Douglas Bain assumed the office of Senedd Commissioner for Standards on 1 April 2021 following a period as Acting Standards Commissioner since November 2019 after the resignation of Sir Roderick Evans.
2. He was the Northern Ireland Assembly Commissioner for Standards from 2012 to 2017.
3. The office of Standards Commissioner was created by the National Assembly for Wales Commissioner for Standards Measure 2009. The main duty of the Commissioner is to investigate and report on admissible complaints that a Member has broken the provisions of the Code of Conduct or certain other provisions. By law, the Commissioner is prohibited from giving information about any particular complaint.
4. For further information or media interviews, contact:

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