

Three Year Strategic Plan 2005-08

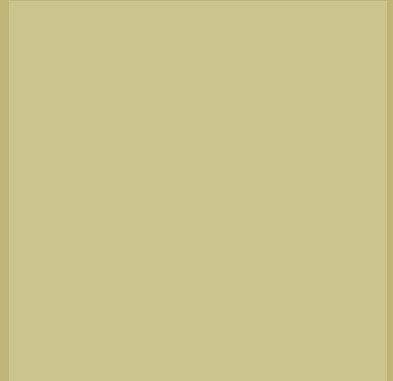


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Foreword



I am delighted to introduce the three year strategic plan for my Office, which sets out both our strategic direction and our more immediate objectives for the service we provide.

The key themes are improving the quality and efficiency of our complaints handling service; developing the availability, accessibility and use of our service; developing our capability to share our knowledge and expertise and creating a dialogue with others to influence improvements in the delivery of public services.

This is the Office's first three year strategic plan. The plan contains the Office's vision, values, strategic aims and objectives, and priorities from April 2005 to March 2008. The plan also sets out the measures by which we will monitor the organisation's performance. It sets out a challenging programme of work for the next three years, and we should not underestimate the demands it will make on staff at all levels within the Office.

We are currently dealing with an unprecedented level of complaints and are operating within a context of much wider change in the form of the public service reform agenda and the reform of the NHS complaints procedure. Despite these pressures, my staff have continued to work with dedication and professionalism, and have embraced the vision of a continually improving, accessible, modern and responsive Ombudsman service which the public has a right to expect. I am deeply impressed by their commitment, and I look forward to working with them and in partnership with others to make that vision a reality.

Ann Abraham
Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

1 Role, vision and values

The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) exists to:

‘provide a service to the public by undertaking independent investigations into complaints that government departments, a range of other public bodies in the UK, and the NHS in England, have not acted properly or fairly or have provided a poor service.’

Our vision

We aim to:

- make our service available to all who need it
- operate open, transparent, fair, customer-focused processes
- understand complaints and investigate them thoroughly, quickly and impartially, and secure appropriate outcomes *and*
- share learning to promote improvement in public services.

Our values

The values which underpin everything we do are:

EXCELLENCE

We pursue excellence in all that we do in order to provide the best possible service:

- we seek feedback to achieve learning and continuous improvement
- we operate thorough and rigorous processes to reach sound, evidence-based judgments
- we are committed to enabling and developing our staff so that they can provide an excellent service.

LEADERSHIP

We lead by example and believe our work should have a positive impact:

- we set high standards for ourselves and others
- we are an exemplar and provide expert advice in complaints handling
- we share learning to achieve improvement.

INTEGRITY

We are open, honest and straightforward in all our dealings, and use time, money and resources effectively:

- we are consistent and transparent in our actions and decisions
- we take responsibility for our actions and hold ourselves accountable for all that we do
- we treat people fairly.

DIVERSITY

We value people and their diversity and strive to be inclusive:

- we respect others, regardless of personal differences
- we listen to people to understand their needs and tailor our service accordingly
- we promote equal access to our service for all members of the community.

These values will shape our behaviour, both as an organisation and as individuals working in the Ombudsman's office.

2 Aims and objectives: 2005-08

The core of our business is the provision of a high quality and customer-focused complaints service that is available to all who need it. In order to deliver this, we need to increase our awareness and understanding of our customers' needs – be they complainants, bodies within our jurisdiction, MPs, advisers or any others that we interact with. We also need to anticipate and manage risks and changes in customers' needs and within the environment in which we operate. This will help us to plan our service in the future and develop our capacity to respond to these changes. Finally, our staff are critical to us in delivering a high quality service and we want to continue to develop our internal skills and expertise.

Aim	To deliver a high quality complaints handling service to customers		
Objectives	To deliver a high quality service based on understanding our customers' needs and making our service accessible to all who need it	To maintain a high quality service by anticipating the impact of changes in customers' needs and public service policy and developing our capacity to respond	To operate a high quality service by developing high performing staff and getting the best from our resources

We are also committed to contributing to improvements in public service delivery by becoming an influential organisation. We aim to do this by sharing our knowledge and expertise with others and establishing a distinct and recognised role for ourselves. Part of this will be delivered through the publication of special reports such as our recent report *Making things better? A report on reform of the NHS complaints procedure in England* and we aim to publish more special reports and good practice guidance over the next three years.

Aim	To contribute to improvements in public service delivery by being an influential organisation, sharing our knowledge and expertise		
Objectives	To establish a distinct and recognised role in the administrative justice landscape and regulatory environment	To be recognised and utilised by others as a source of expertise in good administration and complaint handling	To be an authoritative voice on delivering systemic change, actively sought out by others

3 Organisational priorities

We have four core priorities driving our business. They are:

- improving the quality and efficiency of our complaints handling service
- developing the availability, accessibility and use of our service, reflecting and understanding the diversity of those who need it
- developing our capability to share our knowledge and expertise internally and externally
- creating a dialogue with others to influence improvements in the delivery of public services.

3.1 Improving the complaints handling service

The last year has seen many changes within the organisation, the most recent being the introduction of a new business approach. This year, we intend to build on the new approach by raising the bar in terms of the quality of our work. This will involve:

- meeting or exceeding customer service standards for our complaints handling which will be reviewed on a regular basis in order to improve customer service
- recruiting, developing and retaining a diverse, high-performing workforce with the necessary knowledge and skills
- creating a well-equipped and productive environment for staff with the appropriate infrastructure to deliver our core service
- ensuring our recommendations result in fair outcomes for complainants and improvements to services
- increasing our understanding of stakeholder needs through regular research into customer and stakeholder satisfaction
- improving our corporate and financial governance and accountability systems to ensure we are as effective and efficient as possible.

3.2 Developing the availability, accessibility and use of our service

A joint survey with the Local Government Ombudsman in 2003 showed low awareness of our service among the population, particularly amongst young people and minority ethnic groups. We want to increase awareness of our service, improve accessibility and ensure that those who need our service are able to and do use it. We will do this by:

- developing our relationships with advisers, MPs and bodies within our jurisdiction to improve their understanding and awareness of our service
- continually improving our external communications including our website, leaflets and other information sources
- improving our understanding of, and response to, issues of diversity and equality through the development and implementation of a clear diversity strategy
- monitoring the demographic profile of our complainants to ensure we are reaching those groups who need us most.

3.3 Developing our capability to share our knowledge and expertise

In order to contribute to improvements in public service delivery, we want to share our knowledge and expertise built from learning from our investigations. We will be in a position where we can identify themes and work with service providers, central government and the NHS to help drive changes for the benefit of the users of public services. We aim to do this by:

- developing our internal knowledge sharing capabilities to become a learning organisation
- bringing together our understanding of the external environment with our internal expertise
- developing our relationships with external stakeholders so that we can easily and effectively communicate with them
- identifying and communicating themes arising from our investigations and the complaints we receive
- developing integrated communication and business systems which support our ability to become a learning organisation.

3.4 Creating a dialogue with others

Earlier this year, we published a special report which made recommendations for the development of a modern, responsive, patient-focused system for NHS complaints. In the future, we wish to:

- publish more reports that engage government, the NHS and other relevant bodies in a dialogue to drive systemic improvements in the delivery of public services
- promote redress policies and mechanisms which achieve fair outcomes for individuals and contribute positively to improving public services.

We also aim to develop a greater awareness and understanding of the Ombudsman's role in dispute resolution within the wider administrative justice landscape and regulatory environment, in the interests of users of the various dispute resolution mechanisms.

To achieve this, we will:

- develop and publish further good practice guidance on good administration and complaint handling and a minimum of three special reports each year
- work with appropriate partners, such as other Ombudsmen, the National Audit Office and the Healthcare Commission, to promote and support improvements in public service delivery
- maintain and strengthen our links with the wider Ombudsman community, complaint handlers and regulators
- develop our links with the courts, tribunals and other dispute resolution providers, and with the proposed Administrative Justice Council as it develops
- develop awareness of and links with Ombudsmen in Europe and internationally.

4 Measuring success

The following summarises our plans and performance targets for each of our objectives for the next three years. More detail about the specific measures/targets can be found in Appendix 1.

Objective 1: to deliver a high quality service based on understanding our customers' needs and making our service accessible to all who need it

Our primary performance measure for this objective is 'customer satisfaction'. We wish to measure how satisfied our complainants are with our complaint handling service. We intend to carry out a regular complainant satisfaction survey that looks at all aspects of our service, taking into account the outcome of our investigations. As this will be a new survey for the organisation, we intend to identify our current level of satisfaction in the first year and increase this year on year. The data from the survey will be supported by an examination of the number and type of complaints we receive about our service from dissatisfied complainants and the outcome of any judicial review applications.

Our second measure relates to accessibility, ensuring that our service is accessible to all those who need it regardless of social class, ethnicity, gender, location, religion or age group. We have recently begun to monitor the profile of complainants and will benchmark this against other relevant organisations.

Finally, we have set customer service standards and delivery targets which determine what proportion of complaints we aim to complete within three, six and twelve months with different targets for health and parliamentary complaints. This reflects differences in the nature of the complaints. Over the next three years we aim to meet or exceed these targets.

Time we will take to deal with complaints we can investigate

	Health complaints	Parliamentary complaints
0-3 months	30%	80%
0-6 months	60%	85%
0-12 months	90%	95%

The service standards also set out how quickly we aim to deal with enquiries we receive, which we are not able to investigate, and the time taken to deal with complaints about us.

Time we will take to deal with enquiries and complaints which we are not able to investigate

Telephone enquiry	1 working day
Email enquiry	1 working day
Written enquiry	5 working days
Premature complaint, i.e. one which we cannot yet investigate	10 working days
Complaint which is clearly outside our jurisdiction	10 working days

Time we will take to deal with complaints about us

Acknowledgement of complaint	2 working days
Substantive response to complaint	20 working days

Objective 2: to maintain a high quality service by anticipating the impact of changes in customers' needs and public service policy and developing our capacity to respond

The measures for objective 2 focus on our understanding of, and ability to respond to, changes in the environment which impact on our work. Our core measure will be that staff have the knowledge and information they require regarding customer needs and public policy, and their implications for public service delivery, and we will be measuring this in our annual staff survey. We are developing our knowledge and information strategy and have already made progress on this through the development of the Intranet and lunchtime seminars. We intend to provide staff with other tools and processes through which they can gather and share knowledge about recent policy changes/announcements affecting public service delivery and customers' needs.

As an organisation, we need to be managing and responding effectively to changes in demand for our service. This involves dealing with complaints as they come in effectively and efficiently and being aware of emerging issues. We aim to undertake preliminary work on a complaint soon after its receipt and to allocate all complaints within our jurisdiction to an investigator within six weeks. We will be monitoring progress against this standard. We also want to be aware of, and in a position to respond to, emerging issues or problems that may impact on our work. Therefore we will identify emerging themes and patterns in enquiries we receive and actively manage risk in all areas of our work.

Objective 3: to operate a high quality service by developing high performing staff and getting the best from our resources

One way in which we will measure our performance is by the number of cases completed each year in relation to the number of staff we have. We aim to increase productivity over the three years. We will also benchmark our performance against other similar organisations.

Another measure of our performance against this objective is that staff reflect and understand the diversity of our complainants. We will measure this by identifying the extent to which our complainants agree that their diverse needs were recognised and met by our staff. We will also be developing a diversity strategy from which other measures may emerge. Supporting this will be an examination of the profile of our workforce to ensure that we have representation and understanding from a broad range of backgrounds.

We recognise that to get the most out of our staff, we need to ensure that they enjoy and gain personal satisfaction from working for PHSO and we will be monitoring staff satisfaction through the annual survey and identifying core issues for staff that will need addressing. We will also regularly monitor absence/sickness rates and staff turnover.

Getting the best from our resources also means that we are providing value for money and we will be commissioning value for money audits which will highlight areas for improvement. We will also regularly monitor spend to ensure that it is in line with our forecasts and identify areas of variance or high expenditure.

Finally, we are aiming to achieve Investors in People (IiP) re-accreditation in 2005-06 having been first awarded IiP in 1999 and reaccredited in 2002-03. IiP is a national quality standard which sets a level of good practice for improving an organisation's performance through its people. It provides a framework for this through a planned approach to setting and communicating business objectives and developing people to meet these objectives. There are ten key indicators and a number of supportive indicators covering strategy, learning and development, management capabilities and effectiveness and performance. Our performance against these indicators will determine whether and to what extent we achieve our target.

Objective 4: to establish a distinct and recognised role in the administrative justice landscape and regulatory environment

Measures for objective 4 focus on stakeholders' awareness and understanding of PHSO. Our key stakeholders include MPs, advisory organisations, bodies within our jurisdiction, patient forums and other complaint handling organisations as well as complainants and potential complainants who come to us with enquiries and premature complaints and indeed those who have not yet had the cause to complain.

A survey carried out jointly with the Local Government Ombudsman in 2004 showed low awareness of Ombudsmen services and PHSO in particular. As a result we have developed a new external communications strategy that has included rebranding the organisation, relaunching our Internet site and producing new leaflets for complainants. In order to monitor the success of these and other awareness raising opportunities, we will be measuring awareness of our service amongst our stakeholders through an annual stakeholder survey.

Having determined awareness of our organisation, we also intend to monitor to what extent stakeholders understand our role and jurisdiction. This will also be monitored through the stakeholder survey. As awareness and understanding of our service and role increase, we would expect the number of premature complaints to fall and so we will be monitoring this as well.

Our final measure in relation to objective 4 relates to our distinctiveness in the administrative justice landscape and regulatory environment. The number of regulators, Ombudsmen and other complaint handling bodies has increased rapidly in recent years and it is important that stakeholders clearly recognise and value the difference between PHSO and other bodies. We will measure this by looking at where stakeholders say they would go for a range of different complaints through our annual stakeholder research.

Objective 5: to be recognised and utilised by others as a source of expertise in good administration and complaint handling

To achieve this objective, we would expect to see that stakeholders recognise and value our expertise and ask more from us. Therefore, we will be monitoring media coverage of the complaints we handle, the conferences we are invited to speak at or the interviews we give.

We will also publish a minimum of three special reports or good practice guides each year. The annual stakeholder survey will also monitor the proportion of stakeholders who rate us as experts in complaint handling as well as identifying areas for improvement.

Objective 6: to be an authoritative voice on delivering systemic change, actively sought out by others

Our final objective relates to the impact that we have on the delivery of public services. We are establishing a variety of mechanisms to secure compliance with the recommendations from our investigations. We aim to achieve 100% compliance amongst the service providers. We intend to monitor the type of recommendations we make to inform our special reports and good practice guidance and the reasons for non-compliance so we can work with the relevant bodies to help improve services.

In addition, we will use the annual stakeholder survey to determine whether stakeholders recognise improvements in service as a result of PHSO's recommendations.

The measures outlined in this three year strategic plan are designed to reflect a range of views of the Office – from external stakeholders and staff, from actual and potential complainants and from an analysis of our business processes. We will monitor our performance every quarter and identify any remedial action that is required to ensure that, over the next three years, we achieve the aims and objectives set out in this plan.

5 Resources 2005-06

Our budget for 2005-06 is £22.1m. We are committed to managing our resources effectively and to securing good value for money through sound and appropriate financial and governance arrangements and at the same time, being able to respond to changes in demand for our services. In allocating budgets across the Office our aim has been to ensure that our key business objectives are achieved.

Specifically we will:

- operate within our budget as agreed with the Treasury
- ensure that we make sound and cost-effective investment in new technology, systems and infrastructure which support improved customer-service in the future.
- closely monitor the use of our resources and implications of changes to our workloads over the year
- manage effectively financial pressures and risks to achieving our business objectives, through reallocation and utilisation of contingency arrangements where necessary and discussing with the Treasury at an early stage any major new demands requiring additional resources

Our funding is currently provided on an annual basis, but work is underway with the Treasury to agree a three-year settlement process which would be aligned with our strategic plan. This includes discussion on our capital investment strategy and its funding implications.

Appendix 1

Detailed outcomes and measures

Objective 1: to deliver a high quality service based on understanding our customers' needs and making our service accessible to all who need it

OUTCOME	MEASURE	SUPPORTING COMMENTARY
Complainants are satisfied with our complaint handling service	Percentage of complainants who are satisfied with our complaint handling service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other questions on the customer satisfaction survey • Number and type of complaints about our service • Judicial review decisions
Our service is accessible to all who need it	Profile of our complainants benchmarked against other relevant organisations	
We meet or exceed our stated customer service standards and delivery targets	Percentage of complaints completed in three months, six months and 12 months – targets as set out in customer service standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time taken to deal with enquiries and complaints we are not able to investigate • Time taken to deal with complaints about our service

Objective 2: to maintain a high quality service by anticipating the impact of changes in customers' needs and public service policy and developing our capacity to respond

OUTCOME	MEASURE	SUPPORTING COMMENTARY
Staff feel they have knowledge and information about customer needs and public policy	Percentage of staff who feel they have knowledge and information about a) customer needs and b) public policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary of recent policy changes/ announcements • Summary of recent customer needs information • Knowledge sharing initiatives
We are managing and responding to demand for our services	Percentage of cases allocated within six weeks (out of total number of complaints received)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of investigators • Emerging themes • General risk status from risk register • Top risks identified from risk register

Objective 3: to operate a high quality service by developing high performing staff and getting the best from our resources

OUTCOME	MEASURE	SUPPORTING COMMENTARY
Productivity is increasing	Number of cases completed each year in relation to the number of staff we have	
Staff reflect and understand the diversity of our complainants	Percentage of customers who feel that their needs are understood and met by staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Profile of workforce
Staff are satisfied with working for PHSO	Percentage of staff who are satisfied with working for PHSO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence/sickness rates • Staff turnover • Other questions from staff survey
PHSO provides value for money	Value for money audits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spend vs forecasts • Explanations for variance • Forecast information • Areas of high expenditure
Investors in People re-accreditation	Performance against ten key indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional information against sub-indicators

Objective 4: to establish a distinct and recognised role in the administrative justice landscape and regulatory environment

OUTCOME	MEASURE	SUPPORTING COMMENTARY
Stakeholders are aware of PHSO and its contribution	Percentage of stakeholders who are aware of PHSO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing campaigns/outreach work information
Stakeholders understand PHSO's role and jurisdiction	Percentage of stakeholders who choose the correct role/jurisdiction statement (from a list of different ones)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of premature complaints
Stakeholders recognise and value the difference between PHSO and other administrative justice and regulatory bodies	Percentage of general public who say they would complain to PHSO about a relevant complaint	

Objective 5: to be recognised and utilised by others as a source of expertise in good administration and complaint handling

OUTCOME	MEASURE	SUPPORTING COMMENTARY
Increase in demand for our expertise	At least three special reports published each year Media coverage for the quarter Conferences spoken at/ interviews given	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggestions for future reports identified by staff
Stakeholders recognise and value our expertise	Percentage of stakeholders who rate PHSO as experts in complaint handling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Other relevant data from stakeholder survey e.g. strengths and weaknesses

Objective 6: to be an authoritative voice on delivering systemic change, actively sought out by others

OUTCOME	MEASURE	SUPPORTING COMMENTARY
Recommendations are complied with and implemented	100% of bodies are complying with PHSO recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Type of recommendations made • Reasons for non-compliance
Stakeholders recognise improvements in service as a result of PHSO's recommendations	Percentage of stakeholders who agree 'I have seen improvements in service as a result of PHSO's recommendations'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of improvements recognised

Please note

The telephone numbers of the
Parliamentary and Health Service
Ombudsman changed on 15 March 2009.

The new contact details are:

Helpline: 0345 015 4033

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