

Three Year Strategic Plan 2007-10



Foreword

In line with many other organisations, PHSO reviews its three year strategic plan every year. The plan outlines our objectives and priorities for the period from 2007–2010. In the last year, we have seen proposals for change to health and social care complaints and the Child Support Agency and we expect other changes to the delivery of public services over the next year. This means we need to refocus our priorities and how we will address those changes. This plan outlines our priorities for the next three years and how we will measure our success at achieving our objectives.

Our aims and objectives remain the same. We still aim to deliver a high quality complaints handling service to customers and contribute to improvements in public service delivery by being an influential organisation, sharing our knowledge and expertise. Although we have made some progress towards achieving our aims and objectives there is still some way to go. Therefore, as last year, we will concentrate our efforts in these three areas:

- Continuously improving the *quality* of our service
- Increasing the *efficiency* of all aspects of our core activities
- Extending our *influence* with others to help improve public service delivery

However, the way we deliver these priorities will change to reflect the progress we have made in the last year. This plan outlines some of the ways we hope to achieve them.

This year we are celebrating our 40th anniversary and we have launched our *Principles of Good Administration*. We need to ensure that we are living these principles if we expect others to do so too. These principles are:

- Getting it right
- Being customer focused
- Being open and accountable
- Acting fairly and proportionately
- Putting things right
- Seeking continuous improvement

To achieve these, and to respond to external issues, we will need to make changes to the way we work, the way we are structured and the way we behave. We cannot afford to sit back and let things change around us – we must be proactive and plan accordingly. We must ensure that we are achieving our values of excellence, leadership, integrity and diversity.

The priorities in this document are what we expect to do next year. They are challenging, deliberately so, but I have confidence that we can achieve these and help the organisation to continue to develop and grow. I look forward to working with staff and others to achieve these aims.

Ann Abraham

Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

1 Role 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 is 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
- Share learning to promote improvement in public services

The values which underpin everything we do are as follows:

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: 2007-2010

The core of our business remains unaltered and 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 continue 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 changes in these 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 them. Our staff are vital to us in delivering a high quality service and we will 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 committed to using our influence to contribute to improvements in public service delivery. 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 our publications, such as *Principles of Good Administration*, and we aim to publish more 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 complaints handling	To be an authoritative voice on delivering systemic change, actively sought out by others

3 Organisational priorities

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

- continuously improving the *quality* of our service;
- increasing the *efficiency* of all aspects of our core activities;
- extending our *influence* with others to help improve public service delivery.

3.1 Continuously improving the *quality* of our service

Our customers and the bodies we investigate expect us to carry out our work to an exemplary standard. The quality of our work underpins the approach that we take and we always strive to improve our quality standards. We seek to achieve this by:

- being consistent in the quality of our work;
- actively sharing our knowledge with and learning from each other;
- identifying appropriate opportunities for joint working with other organisations.

3.2 Increasing the *efficiency* of all aspects of our core activities

Last year saw us make great progress in managing our workload strategically. We have worked closely with a number of bodies within our jurisdiction to identify ways of resolving complaints efficiently and effectively. We have also looked at our own processes to see where we can improve what we do. We will continue to do this by:

- ensuring we are working in the best and most effective way in terms of structures, processes, systems and procedures;
- ensuring staff have the skills, abilities and support to achieve consistently excellent performance;
- understanding the wider context in which we work and building this into our future plans.

3.3 Extending our *influence* with others to help improve public service delivery

From our stakeholder research, it is clear that many of the bodies within our jurisdiction, as well as our complainants, expect us to use the findings from our investigations to help drive improvements in public service delivery. Our main ways of doing this have been through special reports. We will continue to extend our influence by:

- securing effective outcomes and change for complainants;
- building relationships with our key stakeholders, sharing our learning with them and making them more aware of what we do;
- providing information to our stakeholders, that is up to date, easily accessible, reliable and accurate.

4 Measuring Success

We are continuing to improve our performance measurement system in order to ensure that we are effectively monitoring the delivery of expected outcomes over the three year planning period. This includes enhancing our suite of performance measures and indicators to provide a system that:

- better supports decision making at a strategic and tactical level; and
- provides a monitoring and review process to demonstrate ongoing progress towards the achievement of our annual business targets, and our strategic aims and objectives set out in this plan.

At the strategic level, we have identified six main groups of outcomes which we would expect to see from successful delivery of our aims and objectives. These are focused on:

- who our customers are;
- what they tell us about our service;
- whether there is an understanding of our role;
- whether we meet our service standards and targets;
- how well our expertise is recognised as authoritative.

These are underpinned by:

- how effectively we develop and use our resources.

Assessment of outcomes through associated key performance indicators will give a balanced view of our strategic performance and achievements over each successive year. These are set out in the table opposite.

OUTCOMES	KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
Our services are accessible to all who need them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicators from our awareness surveys • Indicators from internal data on customer demographics
Our customers say that we deliver a high quality service that understands and is responsive to their diverse and changing needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicators from our customer satisfaction surveys, including feedback from all of those who ask us to investigate a complaint
Our stakeholders regard us as an influential organisation in contributing to public service delivery, with a distinct and recognised role in the administrative justice landscape and regulatory environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicators from our stakeholder research surveys
We meet our customer service standards and service delivery targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance against customer service standards • Performance against our targets
Our expertise on good administration of complaints handling is recognised as authoritative and our ability to provide evidence to help deliver systemic change is recognised as useful; and both are actively sought and utilised by others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicators from our stakeholder research surveys
We have developed a high performing workforce and the capacity necessary to deliver the highest quality services and outcomes from the resources available to us	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indicators from our staff survey • Indicators from our internal HR and learning & development systems and data • Indicators from financial performance information • Outcome from value-for-money and other internal and external audits

Information on our customer service standards is included in Appendix 1 of this plan.

Information on our other indicators and targets is included in our annual Corporate Business Plan. Performance against our standards, key indicators and targets is reported on quarterly internally (where data is available to do so) and annually in our published Annual Report.

5 Governance and Risk Management

The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (the Ombudsman) is a post which combines the two statutory roles of Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and Health Service Commissioner for England, whose powers are set out in the Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1967 and the Health Service Commissioners Act 1993 respectively. The Ombudsman is solely responsible and accountable for the conduct and administration of all work carried out by the Office and for the decisions made in each case.

The PHSO Advisory Board

To enhance the governance of the Office, improve the transparency with which it operates and bolster the independence of the role, the Ombudsman has appointed a non statutory Advisory Board. This comprises the Ombudsman herself (as Chair and Chief Executive in line with her statutory accountability); and four non-executive external members who bring an external perspective to the Office's work. With the exception of another Ombudsman as a member, all PHSO Advisory Board members are appointed through a process of fair and open competition.

The role of the Advisory Board is to act as a 'critical friend', to provide support and advice to the Ombudsman in providing leadership and good governance of PHSO and to bring an external perspective to assist in the development of policy and practice. The Advisory Board provides specific advice and support on:

- purpose, vision and values;
- strategic direction and planning;
- accountability to stakeholders, including stewardship of public funds; and
- internal control arrangements and risk management arrangements.

The PHSO Advisory Board has two formal sub-committees – an Audit Committee and a Pay Committee – which have key roles in supporting the effective governance of PHSO.

Executive Board

An Executive Board – chaired by the Ombudsman and including, in 2007-08, the Deputy Ombudsman, Deputy Chief Executive and the Director of Policy, Information and Communications – exercises management of PHSO's functions and activities. The Executive Board is responsible for the delivery of PHSO's strategic vision, policies and services to the public and other stakeholders.

The Executive Board meets regularly and is responsible for co-ordinating activity across the organisation. It is the primary forum for making executive decisions about operational, resource, communications and other administrative matters in order to deliver the Business Plan, and for monitoring performance. The role of the Executive Board in decision making carries with it a recognition that, on occasion, there will be some issues for which the decision maker must be the Ombudsman alone.

Risk management

The risk management framework sets out our risk policy, risk appetite and management approach. The framework is based around simple, non-bureaucratic processes reflecting best practice. The key aim is to encourage staff at all levels to identify and respond to risks in a positive way, which supports effective delivery, innovation and improvement – within a systematic framework of analysis, evaluation and review.

The full Governance Statement can be found at **www.ombudsman.org.uk** – select 'About us' then 'Governance' on the website or paste this web address in your browser:

http://www.ombudsman.org.uk/about_us/governance/governance_statement.html

6 Resources

In 2005-06 we agreed a three-year settlement with the Treasury to align with our first strategic plan. Under this agreement, our budget for 2007-08 is £24 million. We have now reached agreement with the Treasury regarding our next three year settlement covering the period 2008-11. Subject to Parliamentary approval our budget will continue to be £24 million per annum for this period.

We remain committed to managing our resources effectively and to securing good value for money through sound and appropriate financial and governance arrangements. At the same time, we seek to be responsive 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;
- closely monitor the use of our resources and implications of changes to our workload over the year;
- effectively manage 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;
- ensure that we make sound and cost-effective investment in new technology, systems and infrastructure which support improved customer service in the future;
- invest in our staff development.

Appendix 1: Our service standards

PHSO has set the following targets for its customer service standards for how quickly we will:

- acknowledge and respond to enquiries;
- deal with complaints once they have been accepted for investigation;
- respond to complaints about us.

Over the next three years we will be setting annual improvement targets in order to be achieving or exceeding our service standard targets at the end of the third year.

Time we will take to acknowledge and respond to enquiries

Email enquiry	Acknowledgement sent within 1 working day
Written enquiry	Acknowledgement sent within 2 working day
Substantive response to enquiries	90% within 40 working days

Time we will take to investigate complaints

From acceptance for investigation	
Within 6 months	60%
Within 12 months	90%

Time we will take to deal with complaints about us

Initial response to complaints	95% within 5 working days
Substantive response to complaints	
Tier 1	90% within 12 weeks
Tier 2	90% within 16 weeks

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

Fax: 0300 061 4000

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Millbank
London SW1P 4QP

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