Parliament’s Ombudsman Service
Information for Members of Parliament
How the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman can help you

We were set up by Parliament to investigate and resolve complaints that individuals have been treated unfairly, or have received a poor service from government departments and other public organisations in the UK, and the NHS in England.

We are impartial and our service is free for everyone.

Examples of how we have helped people

- A woman had overpaid tax and for two months been due a refund of almost £1,800. The cheque had got stuck in the system. After we got involved, HM Revenue & Customs made the payment.

- We helped a father who had not been receiving enough child support maintenance from his ex-partner since 2006 because of mistakes made by the Child Support Agency. Our involvement meant the Agency paid the father the £10,000 that the family should have received, plus interest. The Agency recovered the money from the ex-partner.

- The UK Border Agency (UKBA) gave a man permission to stay permanently in the UK, but they sent his papers to the wrong address. The man also found that the papers were in his name, but the photograph was of a stranger. Writing to the UKBA did not get him anywhere - it was only after we got involved that he received a reply, and papers that he could use.

What you need to know

By law, complaints about government departments and other public organisations must be referred to us by an MP. Complaints about the NHS can come to us direct or through an MP.

People have to bring their complaint to an MP within a year of first becoming aware of the problem, if they want us to look at it. We can waive this requirement, if we think there are good reasons for the delay in making the complaint.

We will usually only look into a complaint after the organisation concerned has had a chance to try to sort it out. Different organisations have different complaints procedures and some have several stages. We usually expect people to have completed all these stages before they come to us.

Some public services in the UK are covered by other Ombudsmen who may be able to help you - see the next page for details, or call us if you’re unsure about which Ombudsman can help.

Call us on our dedicated MP helpline 0300 061 4953 or email us at MP@ombudsman.org.uk.
### Complaints about ...

- **UK government departments and other public organisations in the UK, and the NHS in England**, including benefits, tax credits and immigration, as well as hospitals, GPs and dentists
  - **Parliamentary & Health Service Ombudsman**
    - Website: www.ombudsman.org.uk
    - Tel: 0300 061 4953

- **Council and social care matters in England**, including housing benefit, planning, council tax, education and all social care issues, both private and council-funded
  - **Local Government Ombudsman**
    - Website: www.lgo.org.uk
    - Tel: 0300 061 0614

- **Public services in Scotland**, including the Scottish Government and its departments and agencies, councils, the NHS, housing associations and social housing, colleges and universities, water providers and prisons
  - **Scottish Public Services Ombudsman**
    - Website: www.spso.org.uk
    - Tel: 0800 377 7330

- **Registered providers of social housing in England**, including all housing associations and local authorities, and other landlords, managers and agents
  - **Housing Ombudsman**
    - Website: www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk
    - Tel: 0300 111 3000

- **Public services in Wales**, the Welsh Government and organisations it sponsors, the NHS, councils (including social care, housing and planning) and housing associations
  - **Public Services Ombudsman for Wales**
    - Website: www.ombudsman-wales.org.uk
    - Tel: 0300 790 0203

- **Public services in Northern Ireland**, including councils, education and library boards, planning, social housing, the NHS, social care and prison health care
  - **Northern Ireland Ombudsman**
    - Website: www.ni-ombudsman.org.uk
    - Tel: 0800 34 34 24

If you are unsure about which Ombudsman is best placed to help with a particular complaint, or whether or not a complaint should go to a second tier complaint handler or tribunal, please get in touch with us. You can call us on our dedicated MP helpline 0300 061 4953 or email us at MP@ombudsman.org.uk.
How we handle complaints

This flowchart outlines the key tests we apply and the actions we undertake when we deal with a complaint.

First contact
- The complaint is about an organisation and subject that we can look into
- The complaint is made to us in writing (if about the NHS) or passed to us by an MP (if about a government department or agency)
- The organisation complained about has had the opportunity to put things right

Asking key questions
- The complaint is in time
- There is/was no reasonable alternative legal remedy open to the complainant
- The final response from the organisation concerned addresses the issues raised in the complaint

Investigation and Resolution
Resolution of complaint is straightforward:
- Complaint resolved quickly
- Final decision

Resolution of complaint is not straightforward or there is a wider public interest:
- Full investigation
- Evidence gathered from files or medical records, correspondence, and telephone or personal interviews
- Final report
- Compliance monitored

Yes

Yes

No

No

- Complaint passed back to organisation to complete OR
- Complainant advised where and how to complain OR
- Complainant helped with getting an MP referral or putting complaint in writing OR
- Explanation given why no further action is needed on the complaint

- Complaint passed back to organisation for further work OR
- Explanation given why no further action is needed on the complaint
Parliament and its Ombudsman

We are independent of government and accountable to Parliament through the Public Administration Select Committee (PASC).

The law gives us the power to investigate, make the final decision on complaints about public services for individuals and recommend how mistakes can be put right. If we think that an issue raised in a complaint is of wider public interest, we can lay a report before Parliament, to alert MPs to individual and/or systemic examples of poor public services. Because of our relationship with Parliament, we can use what we have learnt from our casework to help Parliament find out the reasons for mistakes and how services can be improved.

We want to build our relationship with Parliament by sharing more learning from complaints to support Parliament’s scrutiny of government where services have failed individuals, communities or the public.

As Parliament’s Ombudsman we can:

- Help you when you may not be able to resolve a complaint yourself or if a constituent has asked you to refer a complaint to us.
- Assist Parliament in finding out the reasons for mistakes and how services can be improved.
- Help Parliament hold government and the NHS in England to account for the service they provide and the way they handle complaints.

Examples of how we have helped people

- We helped a family who had been without their tax credit payments for five months and had to borrow from relatives to make ends meet. Our involvement meant that the Tax Credit Office started weekly payments of £200 and paid arrears of £3,716.
- We were able to secure compensation for 18 people who complained to us about the Planning Inspectorate. The Inspectorate had closed its ex gratia payment scheme as part of its plans to reduce spending, forcing people to escalate their complaints to us to seek compensation. We published a report on these complaints that criticised the Inspectorate’s decision to refuse to pay compensation in order to save money. Our report made clear that individuals must not bear the cost of government errors, and that the most cost-effective way to resolve complaints is to do so properly, and as early as possible.
- A man was unable to work because of a delay in processing an update of his HGV licence. Because of our involvement, the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency sent the updated licence within a week and started to look at compensation.
Our vision

We want complaints to make a difference and help to improve public services for everyone.

- We want everyone, whoever they are, to be confident that complaining about public services is straightforward and fair.
- When people complain about public services, we want them to be listened to, treated fairly and for mistakes to be put right.
- We want public services to learn from complaints and use them to improve the service they provide to everyone.

Our aims

To help make our vision real, our aims for the next five years are to:

1. Make it easier for people to find and use our service
2. Help more people by investigating more complaints and to provide an excellent service for our customers
3. Work with others to use what we learn from complaints to help them make public services better
4. Lead the way to make the complaints system better
5. Develop our organisation so that it delivers these aims efficiently and effectively
Here to help

If you would like to discuss a particular complaint, or would like more information about our work, we have a dedicated section on our website for MPs, as well as a phone number and email address for MPs and their offices to contact us:

- Visit our dedicated website: www.ombudsman.org.uk/mp
- Call our dedicated MP helpline: 0300 061 4953
- Email our dedicated MP email address: MP@ombudsman.org.uk

Follow us on:

If you want to direct a constituent to us, our contact details are:

- Visit www.ombudsman.org.uk
- Call 0345 015 4033
  You can contact us from a textphone on 0300 061 4298 if you are deaf or have problems using a standard telephone
- Email phso.enquiries@ombudsman.org.uk
- Text ‘call back’ with your name and mobile number to 07624 813 005 and we will call you back
- Fax 0300 061 4000
- Write to Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4QP

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