



Parliamentary
and Health Service
Ombudsman



Corporate Strategy

2022-2025

Large print

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Foreword

From the Ombudsman and Chief Executive

Every day we hear stories of how people have faced injustice, whether in the services provided by the health sector or in those provided by Government and its agencies. These stories are about people who didn't get the support they wanted at the most difficult of times.

Sometimes they are about two sides who can't communicate. Sometimes they are about failure to do the right thing. Sometimes they are about tragedy. It is these stories that drive us to resolve disputes, to champion rights and to help organisations learn from mistakes so they are not repeated, and public services are improved.

Our last strategic plan underpinned a journey of transformation for the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO). In this new plan we set out how we will move on to the next stage of our journey of continuous improvement.

This comes against the background of the impact of the pandemic and the need to learn the lessons of

COVID-19, both as an organisation and in relation to those in our jurisdiction. As we move into recovery, we need to make sure we benefit from the opportunity to learn and see what works, what needs to change, and where we can improve as a modern and vibrant service that defends people's rights.

As a result, our strategy focuses on broadening access and raising awareness of our service so that more people benefit from it, including disadvantaged communities and voices heard less often. It gives prominence to the harnessing of data and using technology to increase transparency and to maximise the impact of lessons learned. It provides for a significant increase in effort to enable the provision of a modern, digital casework service, that can meet the increased demands placed upon it.

Above all, this will be a partnership effort, a task we will need to undertake with stakeholders across the NHS and Government, across the justice and advice sectors, and with advocacy organisations.

We will also take this work forward in partnership with international stakeholders, playing our part in the global effort to modernise the Ombuds institution

and holding ourselves to account in meeting international standards.

We have consulted extensively, both internally and with our partners, on the new direction set out in this strategy. It was heartening to see the level of interest we had, and the degree of consensus that our approach is the right one. Now we must deliver. We are proud of our dedicated and skilled team who are eager to put this strategy into practice.

Everything we achieve is because of their efforts, and their development and support is at the heart of our approach.

It is our great honour, as the Ombudsman and Chief Executive, to lead PHSO through this exciting new era. We look forward to sharing our success with you in the months and years to come.

**Rob Behrens, CBE,
Ombudsman and Chair**

**Amanda Amroliwala, CBE,
Chief Executive**

Primary purpose

We resolve disputes to drive accountability and standards in public services.

Vision

A voice for improvement in public services through the provision of an independent, impartial and fair complaints handling service, as an internationally respected public services ombudsman.

Our three strategic objectives

1. People who use public services have a better awareness of the role of the Ombudsman and can easily access our service
2. People we work with receive a high quality, empathetic and timely service, according to international Ombudsman principles
3. We contribute to a culture of learning and continuous improvement, leading to high standards in public service

Objective 1: People who use public services have a better awareness of the role of the Ombudsman and can easily access our service

Aims:

a. We will remove barriers to our service

How will we know this is happening?

We will:

- carry out research to understand what prevents people from bringing their complaint to us, which groups of people are less likely to do so and why; develop and implement a programme of engagement in response to findings
- work with partners in the justice sector and with advocacy groups to improve signposting and referrals and understanding of common themes, so we can identify how we can work together to overcome barriers

- highlight opportunities for legislative reform so we can better support people who use public services, and adjust our ways of working where necessary

b. We will improve public awareness of what we do and provide clarity about our role so service users can make informed choices

How will we know this is happening?

We will:

- publish more information about our casework decisions and make sure we are transparent about what we do by providing more data on our work and its impact
- identify opportunities (including with stakeholders, journalists and on social media) to disseminate and promote key reports and publications

c. We will focus our resources to make sure the right decision is made at the right time

How will we know this is happening?

We will:

- use appropriate resource to achieve the most effective and practical outcome in each case, according to published guidelines
- review our ways of working, end to end process and operating model to make sure we are working in the most effective way
- promote and develop systemic investigations to improve our strategic impact

Objective 2: People we work with receive a high quality, empathetic and timely service, according to international Ombudsman principles

Aims:

a. We embed in our work the Venice Principles¹ on the Protection and Promotion of the Ombudsman Institute (as endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly)

How will we know this is happening?

We will:

- raise awareness of and map the Principles against our service, identify gaps and work to address them

¹ The [Venice Principles](#) were adopted in 2019 by the Venice Commission as a relevant international reference text setting out the legal principles essential for the establishment and proper functioning of Ombudsman institutions at all levels of democratic governments. The Venice Commission is the Council of Europe's Commission for Democracy through Law providing legal advice to its Member States. The Venice Principles were endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2020.

- identify and call out flagrant breaches of fundamental human rights

b. People who use our service experience best practice in complaint handling

How will we know this is happening?

We will:

- embed in the organisation the Academy of Learning, our professional learning and accreditation programme, and work to improve the quality of case-handling at all levels
- provide an appropriate range of services, including a fully developed mediation service
- improve the pace at which we deal with complaints, making sure the number of unallocated cases is reduced and kept at a level which supports effective business management
- develop our culture as a learning organisation across all aspects of our work - this will include a review of our Service Charter to capture better learning from people who use our service and incorporate this into our ways of working

- improve the degree to which we represent the communities we serve, benchmarking our team at all levels against regional diversity data
- set up a panel of users and members of the public who can provide feedback and inform our work
- prioritise a healthy and effective working environment for all employees

c. We will harness new technology to provide a more efficient, effective and inclusive service for people who work with us

How will we know this is happening?

We will:

- use data to improve our services and those of the organisations we investigate - this will include identifying key factors that impact on service quality, and forecasting and tracking results
- allow complainants and organisations we investigate direct access to upload key information and track progress
- introduce new and efficient ways to gather evidence and to analyse complaints - this will include identifying frequent themes and

highlighting underlying issues which may be missed when handling complaints in isolation

- adopt smarter working that optimises technology, is more effective, more efficient and reduces our environmental impact

Objective 3: We contribute to a culture of learning and continuous improvement, leading to high standards in public service

Aims:

a. Our work leads to a better standard of complaint handling in organisations we investigate

How will we know this is happening?

We will:

- develop and monitor the Complaint Standards in the NHS
- work with Government departments and agencies to set up complaint standards for all bodies we investigate
- develop an accreditation system for frontline complaints handlers

b. Organisations we investigate are held to account for poor service provision and low standards of complaints handling

How will we know this is happening?

We will:

- share more of the learning from our casework by laying significant investigations and reports in Parliament
- provide more information to relevant Committees to help them hold organisations we investigate to account
- develop effective partnerships with MPs and stakeholders so that it is easier for people to be referred to our service
- frame recommendations in a way that ensures continuous improvement in the provision of public services
- monitor the implementation of our recommendations, identify gaps and develop strategies for improving levels of compliance

c. The Ombudsman has a credible, high profile voice for change and improvement in public services

How will we know this is happening?

We will:

- use our own improved technology and engage with partners to gather data that will help identify sector-wide improvements
- develop our thought leadership to influence national dialogue, sharing our expertise and insight from our casework - this will include lessons learned from the pandemic, examples of good and poor practice in complaint handling, reasonable expectations of public services and what the relationship between the provider and the public should look like
- strengthen the Ombudsman's voice by working in partnership with regulators in our sector.

We will produce a business plan for each year of the 2022-25 strategy, detailing all activity to deliver the objectives. This will include an evaluation to identify and measure impact.

Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

Citygate
Mosley Street
Manchester
M2 3HQ
United Kingdom

Telephone: 0345 015 4033

Fax: 0300 061 4000

Email: phso.enquiries@ombudsman.org.uk

www.ombudsman.org.uk

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