

Business plan 2023-2024

Since publishing this report,
we have changed our name to
the Public Service Ombudsman.

Our role and the service
we provide remain the same.

Public Service
Ombudsman

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Welcome from the Ombudsman and Chief Executive



Rob Behrens CBE
Ombudsman and Chair



Amanda Amroliwala CBE
Chief Executive Officer

Message from the Ombudsman and Chief Executive

In recent years, PHSO has been on a journey to evolve, seeking to continuously improve the service we provide to the public and the way we work with organisations we investigate. Like other organisations, we've also had to respond to the impact COVID-19 has had on our work.

Perhaps the biggest post-pandemic challenge for PHSO has been the increased number of cases referred to us. In the last 12 months, our focused approach to managing the casework queue that built up has seen it reduce from over 2,400 cases down to 1,200. This is no mean feat and is something to be proud of.

We should be equally proud that this work to transform our service was praised in the first independent ombudsman peer review carried out under the auspices of the International Ombudsman Institute. The review confirmed that PHSO provides an 'efficient, enhanced and effective modern service', that our training academy and accreditation for senior caseworkers set new and high standards in the Ombudsman sector, and that we deliver significant value for stakeholders. This is testament to the hard work and dedication of all who work here.

We are now in the second year of our corporate strategy. Last year set the foundations for the change and improvements we want to see over the lifecycle of this strategy. This year is about embedding these new approaches. This business plan provides an overview of our priorities for 2023 to 2024 so we can deliver our strategic objectives.

Our highly regarded Complaint Standards continue to gain momentum, and we will shortly launch an online training offer to support complaint handlers to meet them. The coming year will see us refer to the standards in our own casework, and we will continue to evaluate their success as they are further rolled out in the NHS, Government departments and public bodies.

We will increase direct engagement with the public so our service is accessible to everyone, through our new outreach programme and our public user engagement panel. We will also review our commitments under the Service Charter so they meet the expectations of people who use our service and the organisations we investigate.

To support this work, we will continue to invest in our infrastructure to meet the needs of a modern and effective ombudsman service. We will explore how we can harness digital technology to help more people use our service, and we will push ahead with transforming the delivery of our casework to provide a better service. Further reducing the amount of time people are waiting for us to look at their case will be a key focus of our work for 2023 to 2024.

We will also continue to highlight the need for ombudsman reform. This is essential to remove barriers to the complaints service and bring England in line with the rest of the UK and other global democracies when it comes to citizens' rights to seek justice.

Through all of this we will support our people by further embedding new structures and ways of working, providing more training across the organisation and modernising our HR policies.

We recognise this plan will be delivered against a background of mounting challenges for the NHS and Government, with staffing shortages, long waiting lists, funding challenges, the cost-of-living crisis and the war in Ukraine to contend with. But this should not hamper our ambition. The insight our casework provides and the improvements our recommendations can bring will play an important part in helping organisations deliver a better service despite these challenges.

The transformation of PHSO continues. We have come a long way but there is still some way to go. Through this business plan, we will be closer to reaching our aim to provide a modern and accessible ombudsman service, giving more people the chance to get redress when things go wrong and helping make public services better for everyone.

Part 1

Who we are

Who we are

We were set up by Parliament to provide an independent complaint handling service for complaints that have not been resolved by the NHS in England and UK government departments.

We share findings from casework to help Parliament scrutinise public service providers. We also share our findings more widely to help drive improvements in public services and complaint handling.

Role

We combine the two statutory roles of Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration (the Parliamentary Ombudsman) and Health Service Commissioner for England (Health Service Ombudsman). The powers are set out in the Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1967 and the Health Service Commissioners Act 1993.

We are independent of government and the NHS in England. We are neither a regulator nor a consumer champion.

We are accountable to Parliament and our work is scrutinised by the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee.

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.

Values

PHSO's values were developed in close consultation with our staff so we all have a shared understanding about the type of ombudsman service we want to be.

The values are:

- **Independence** - we are independent from organisations we investigate, holding them to account for service failure or injustice
- **Fairness** - we listen carefully to complainants and the organisations we investigate, and we make impartial and fair decisions based on relevant evidence
- **Excellence** - we learn from engagement with complainants and organisations we investigate to improve our accessibility, efficiency, effectiveness and the quality of our decisions
- **Transparency** - we communicate with those using our service and then publish information about our findings, how we are performing and how organisations we investigate have implemented our recommendations.

Part 2

A review of the 2022/23 business plan

Our achievements in 2022/23

2022/23 was the first year of our three-year strategy.

During the last year we have focussed on reducing the time that people have had to wait for our service. Due to the increase in demand for our service since the pandemic, which saw an increase in cases of 28%¹ during the pandemic, . As a result, we have reduced the time people must wait by x, and by the end of March 2024, this will have reduced to x.

We have published a number of important findings and recommendations from our casework. This includes a report covering the failings by a CCG about a Continuing Healthcare care which resulted in a £250k remedy for the carer. Also, case summaries of investigations including a sexual assault victim who was denied the opportunity to take legal action because she was given wrong information by the Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office, and the avoidable death of a man days before he was due to wed his partner of 40 years.

In 2022/23 the International Ombudsman Association undertook a peer review of PHSO. They considered [say what they were looking at] The report from International Ombudsman Institute led peer review describes PHSO as being ‘now a substantially stronger organisation’ than at the time of the previous peer review in 2018.

The report recognised the significant improvements we have made in all aspects of our organisation. The report also acknowledged that our approach to understanding and assessing whether we are providing a value for money public service ‘has developed significantly’ since 2018. the panel made some important recommendations for our continued improvement which we are taking forward.

PHSO’s dedicated colleagues continue to be our greatest asset. We have employed more people to deliver and improve our service. We have continued to focus on learning and development, including the leadership programmes for our future leaders (Aspiring Managers, Exemplary Managers and Exemplary Leaders) as well as continuing the professional accreditation for all senior caseworkers. After adapting to homeworking since March 2020, we have now implemented our Future Working Framework, providing the flexibility to maintain a good work lifestyle balance whilst making sure we provide a collaborative modern service.

[1] Complaints received in the first half of 2021/22 compared to the first half of 2018/19

Part 3

Business plan key activities

Business plan key activities

The business plan sets out how we will deliver the new corporate strategy, developing new approaches and making changes across our people, processes and systems.

At its heart is the Casework Programme which will deliver the key strategy objectives. This section sets out the outline scope of the programme and the key deliverables to March 2025. It also includes the wider change activities which will deliver our PHSO 2025 Transformation and wider strategy.

Our core business remains to provide an independent, impartial and fair complaints handling service, for people who use the NHS and central government services. Core business performance will be monitored via the KPIs.

We will also continue to deliver a public policy programme, laying reports, making submissions to Select Committees, maximising the opportunities for legislative reform and working with key partners. Our transparency agenda will include developing and growing the digital publishing platform, and we will enrich user feedback by carrying out a review of the Service Charter.

The first table that follows sets out the key strategy objectives. The second table sets out the change activities, the associated key deliverables, and the resources required.

Description and outline scope	Link to the strategy	Owner	Confidence H/M/L			
				2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Casework Programme We will put people at the heart of the design and delivery of services at all stages of the complaints process, ensuring that everything we do - from initial inquiry to case completion - creates a genuinely <u>user-focused</u> service; We will move to a <u>digital-first</u> approach for complaints processing, providing a convenient service that will be integrated across online, telephone and postal channels - enabling everyone to contact us and access our services in the way that works best for them. We will manage casework dynamically to make informed, strategic and transparent choices about	Objective 1: <i>People who use public services have a better awareness of the role of the Ombudsman and can easily access our service</i> Objective 2: <i>People we work with receive a high quality, empathetic and timely service, according to international Ombudsman principles</i>	Chief Operating Officer (SRO) and Director of Operations, Legal & Clinical (Senior Business Change Owner)	M	Scoping, definition and discovery including: Organisational engagement on vision, aims and objectives Internal focus groups to gather requirements Developing Systemic Casework Strategy Development of digital business case Complete define stage of the programme Casework programme roadmap	Move into design and delivery phase of programme & complete blueprint Start user experience engagement through the Public Engagement Advisory Group and Outreach work, including a minimum of 4 panels Outreach pilots commence based on external intelligence and YouGov research Demand and forecasting model design, data collection and validation Scope, cost and plan digital and technology improvements, including online self service	Continue to implement digital and technology improvements Go live with online self service Design and implement operational structures and role design Complete implementation, embed new ways of working, transfer to BAU and evaluate

Description and outline scope	Link to the strategy	Owner	Confidence H/M/L			
				2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
which complaints we are able to take forward in a timely manner with available resources, to ensure that we maximise <u>public value</u>. We will ensure that PHSO's complaints service is accessible, equitable and inclusive to all We will ensure that PHSO is aware of and attracts those complaints that enable PHSO to have the greatest impact on improving public services				Set up of PHSO's Public Engagement Advisory Group and recruit to group (first meeting will be 19 April) Research and planning of outreach activity	Prioritise, scope, plan and begin implementation of improvements to compliance, human rights, human factors and systemic	
In addition to the activity in the Casework Programme to identify the barriers to complainants accessing our service, we will work with organisations and MPs. We will identify barriers to awareness and access, offer guidance to organisations and build on partnerships with MPs and stakeholders to increase the awareness and accessibility of our service,	Objective 1 <i>People who use public services have a better awareness of the role of the Ombudsman and can easily access our service</i>	Assistant Director of Professional Standards & Partnerships	H	YouGov research on communities/groups who are least likely to complain completed. Use this to inform next steps including what should be delivered	The Parliamentary engagement drop-in session will be held on 19 April Piloting of MP constituency engagements	

Description and outline scope	Link to the strategy	Owner	Confidence H/M/L			
				2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
transforming ourselves into a user-led service.				through casework programme Desk and field research including analysis of MP data Work with MPs and constituency staff to understand the challenges they are facing		
We will develop and build on effective partnerships with other sectors, such as non government organisations and advocacy services to gain greater insights into the complaints they receive, and to develop effective signposting.	Objective 1 <i>People who use public services have a better awareness of the role of the Ombudsman</i>	Assistant Director of Professional Standards & Partnerships	H	Scoping of partnerships	Create Communities of Practice within advocacy/advice sector to seek feedback on impact of Complaint Standards	Develop BAU programme of engagement based on piloting in 2023-24
				Engagement with partner organisations		
				Agree approaches to sharing of intelligence with partners	Create a process for third sector organisations to raise	

Description and outline scope	Link to the strategy	Owner	Confidence H/M/L			
				2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
	<i>and can easily access our service</i>				systemic issues with PHSO more frequently	
Developing our People & Culture Create a great place to work with an engaged, diverse, and inclusive culture where everyone lives our values and works collaboratively to achieve our common goals, committed to continuous improvement and learning, and high-performing.	Business-critical enablers that supports all aspects of the strategy	Assistant Director of People & Talent	H	Develop the People and Talent Strategy Transfer strategy to operational action plans Launch Future Working Framework Review of Terms and Conditions Review of Pay and Grading Deliver Authentic Leadership activities including: SLT Coaching programme, Coaching Framework	Continuation of Authentic Leadership SLT programme Deliver the Active inclusion programme initially focused on race and anti-racism Implement Total Reward Strategy, including Total Remuneration, Pay & Grading, & Performance Management Implement Resourcing Strategy Embed new HR policies via coaching and upskilling managers	Embed Strategic Workforce Planning into leadership teams and BP cycle Pay & Grading scheme that rewards individual performance and reflects external markets Values-based recruitment Development of career paths and succession planning

Description and outline scope	Link to the strategy	Owner	Confidence H/M/L			
				2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
				Develop the Active Inclusion Programme	Development of new management development training	
Reducing casework queue to frictional levels Managing increased demand for our service We will expand our casework teams in year 1 to manage increased demand and more complicated complaints. This will restore our service over time to our pre-pandemic standards	Objective 2: <i>People we work with receive a high quality, empathetic and timely service, according to international Ombudsman principles</i>	Deputy Director of Operations	M	We have expanded our casework teams by a further 36 posts, on top of the 14 posts we added in the first half of 2021/22	We will maintain casework staffing at 2022/23 levels to reduce the queue to frictional levels by March 2024	The new staffing operating model designed in the casework programme will be adopted. Our casework profile will change to focus on cases that have the greatest impact on public services
Developing the casework publishing website We will make improvements to how we publish cases on our website to make it more accessible and easy to navigate increasing engagement with the cases we publish. We will streamline the publishing	1(b) We will improve public awareness of what we do and provide clarity about our role so service users can make	Assistant Director of Communications	M	Identify ways to improve the publishing process including possible solutions for the anonymisation of complaint reports	Implement accessibility and navigation improvements to online platform Impact assess the publishing process improvements including any cost benefit analysis	Complete implementation of improvements

Description and outline scope	Link to the strategy	Owner	Confidence H/M/L			
				2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
process so that more cases can be published	informed choices			Identify accessibility and navigation improvements	Assess and set targets for increasing publication of cases Start implementation of improvements	
Complaint Standards We will evaluate how effectively the complaint standards for public sector and NHS complaint handling are being embedded to identify barriers and enablers and increase our impact on front-line complaint handling	Objectives 2 and 3(a): <i>Our work leads to a better standard of complaint handling in organisations we investigate</i>	Assistant Director of Professional Standards & Partnerships	H	Evaluate and report on NHS pilots	Evaluate and report on NHS standards	Roll out government complaint standards
				Roll out NHS complaint standards	Pilot government complaint standards	Evaluate
				Consult on government complaint standards		
Academy of Learning We will build an Academy of Learning that will further embed our professional learning and accreditation programme for our staff		Assistant Director of People & Talent	H	Scoping and research to determine the feasibility of training and accreditation for organisations in jurisdiction	Go live with external learning management system with NHS and bodies in jurisdiction Make decisions on consultant research and implement	Complete implementation on accreditation and certification programmes

Description and outline scope	Link to the strategy	Owner	Confidence H/M/L			
				2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
We will also explore how our Academy of Learning can help to develop a comprehensive training and accreditation programme to support the delivery of the new complaint standards across organisations in our jurisdiction				and define the model, structure and processes Research certification programmes for Intake and Casework, and how the learning management system can support this Review recommendations from consultant research on certification	agreed recommendations Exploring the business case for accreditation with a quality assurance higher education partner	
Service Charter We will refresh the Service Charter Survey. The ways in which we gather qualitative data about PHSO service will be improved through the development of our survey	Objective 2(b): People who use our service experience best practice in	Assistant Director of Professional Standards & Partnerships	H	Development of new survey questions Research into online survey provision	Carry out user engagement on Service Charter survey changes and methods Development or implementation of online survey	

Description and outline scope	Link to the strategy	Owner	Confidence H/M/L			
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questions and how responses are gathered, categorised and analysed. This will provide better insight into the quality of our service	complaint handling			Commission initial desk research into public attitudes to Service Charter and other PHSO documents (Principles and MyExpectation)	provision for complainants and OWI Development of internal reporting on survey results	
Office Refurbishment We will review our accommodation in Manchester and London to ensure we are making efficient use of the space and providing an engaging and collaborative environment	Business-critical enablers which support delivery of our strategy and service	Assistant Director of ICT & Facilities	H	Make decisions on future London and Manchester office space Use consultancy to develop the design of Citygate Office Refurbishment of Millbank Office	Refurbishment of Citygate Office	
Data, Digital and Technology Strategy	Data, Digital and Technology is a	Assistant Director of Data,	H	Research and development of the strategy, including	Develop the organisation wide DDAT Strategy, with key component the	Continue implementation of the DDAT strategy

Description and outline scope	Link to the strategy	Owner	Confidence H/M/L			
				2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
The Data, Digital and Technology Strategy will be developed. Supports the delivery of the casework programme, and any other business enabling activities	business-critical enabler that supports all aspects of the strategy	Security & Privacy Assistant Director of ICT & Facilities		development of the benefits (initial focus on casework through the Casework Programme)	business case for the digitisation of casework Start implementation of the DDAT strategy	
Maintaining the effectiveness our ICT We will implement the new HR system We will develop the content and functionality of the intranet Ombudshub to improve the quality of the system, usability and staff satisfaction We will deliver the ICT roadmap of activity The Finance system will be replaced	Business-critical enablers which support delivery of our strategy and service	Assistant Director of ICT & Facilities	H	Implement and embed new intranet Implement and embed new HR system Research options for new finance system Produce and start delivery the ICT Roadmap including Windows 11,	Evaluate intranet and HR system through consultancy. Identify future requirements Business process mapping for the new finance system to eliminate inefficiencies Procure and start development of finance system Complete the delivery of the ICT roadmap	Complete development and implement finance system

Description and outline scope	Link to the strategy	Owner	Confidence H/M/L			
				2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
				Egress replacement, Windows Hello, SharePoint & Teams Phase 2, Optimisation of the Network & Device Replacement, Telephony Phase 2 project including call recording pilot		
Value for Money We will further develop our approach to VFM, including assessment of the use of the Public Value Framework and strengthening VFM for Investments	Business-critical enabler which supports delivery of our strategy and service	Assistant Director of Finance	H		Desktop exercise to assess value and proportionality of the Public Value Framework, with future approach agreed with Audit and Risk Committee. Strengthen value for money assessment of use of resources and reporting, integrate within BAU.	

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