

**Approved Minutes of the ad hoc Board meeting held on 18 February 2021  
(Video conference)**

**Chair:**

Rob Behrens CBE, the Ombudsman

**Non-Executive members:**

Sir Alex Allan KCB

Elisabeth Davies

Linda Farrant

Dean Fathers

Balram Gidoomal CBE

Alan Graham MBE

Carolyn Hirst

Anu Singh

Mick King

**In attendance:**

Karl Banister, Director of Legal, Quality  
and Clinical

Bipon Bhakri, Director of Resources

Abigail Howarth, Director of Operations

Maria Mansfeld, Chief of Staff

Warren Seddon, Director of Strategy and  
Communications

Andrew Dawson, Governance Officer  
(minutes)

**Executive Members:**

Amanda Amroliwala CBE, Chief Executive

Gill Kilpatrick, Chief Operating Officer

**Observers:**

Neil Brook, Assistant Director, Operations  
Performance

Cat Farrow, Assistant Director,  
Communications

## **1. Chair's Introduction and Welcome**

- 1.1 Rob Behrens introduced the meeting and welcomed members and others attending.

## **2. Declarations of Interest**

- 2.1 Elisabeth Davies reported a potential conflict of interests as she chairs the Office for Legal Complaints.
- 2.2 Mick King reported a potential conflict of interests arising from his role as Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

## **3. COVID-19 and Demand Management**

- 3.1 The Board considered a paper setting out proposals to manage the impact of the pandemic, against a background of a current queue of 2,600 unallocated complaints, projected to rise to over 4,000 without intervention. It was proposed that, to allow the organisation to focus on complaints raising more serious issues, it would not routinely progress health complaints where the impact of the claimed injustice is relatively limited. This would apply to complaints determined to be at level 1 and level 2 of our *Severity of Injustice* scale. This is in line with other Ombudsman organisations.
- 3.2 Board members raised the following matters in discussion.
- The need to focus on the best interests of service users in addition to managing the casework queue.
  - Whether the proposed action is a short-term measure to manage the queue during the pandemic or would continue in the long-term.
  - The impact on caseworker productivity if more straightforward cases are not investigated, thereby increasing the complexity of their caseload.
  - The need to implement the Complaints Standards quickly.
  - Whether it would be appropriate to exclude less serious Parliamentary complaints from investigation.
  - The need to communicate the changes clearly and effectively.
- 3.3 The following assurances were provided:
- The proposal was driven by the casework position caused by the pandemic and was not intended to be a long term measure. However it may be appropriate to look at this further in the future.
  - Early resolution processes will continue to operate and are not affected by this proposal.
  - The impact of the changes on the complexity of caseworkers' workloads will be monitored.

- The criteria for acceptance of complaints for investigation, including the *Severity of Injustice* scale, will be published.
- The Board's concerns about the need to communicate the change effectively have been noted and the organisation will ensure that the changes are implemented in a way that addresses those concerns.

#### 3.4 The Board:

- i) **Noted** the rationale for a revised approach and actions already implemented to improve efficiency.
- ii) **Noted** the staff engagement to date and proposed approach to external communications.
- iii) **Noted** the impact on the projected queue of cases and waiting times for complainants.
- iv) **Supported** the approach set out in the paper.

**The meeting ended at 10:30**