

Business plan 2022/23

Contents

Welcome from the Ombudsman and Chief Executive	Page 2
Part 1: Who we are	Page 4
Part 2: A review of 2021/22 business plan	Page 6
Part 3: Business plan key activities	Page 8

Welcome from the Ombudsman and Chief Executive



Rob Behrens CBE
Ombudsman and Chair



Amanda Amroliwala CBE
Chief Executive

It has been two years since the start of a global pandemic that dramatically altered how we all live and work. As the recovery continues and we adjust to a different world, our work has never been more important.

After taking the decision to postpone our new three-year strategy, we used 2021/22 to meet the challenges of the pandemic and address increasing demand, whilst continuing to improve our service and work through those cases yet to be allocated. It was also a year of developing plans for the future.

It is an exciting time to be leading the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, continuing the journey we have been on to create a modern and vibrant organisation that improves public services and protects people's rights. Our new strategy sets out an ambitious programme of work to help more people access justice, made possible by an increase in budget that recognises the vital service we provide.

This plan sets out the actions we will take in 2022/23 to improve our service. How we undertake our important casework will evolve through changes to processes but also through harnessing the use of digital technology for greater efficiency and transparency. We will reach more people through direct engagement, make sure more people understand what we do and offer opportunities to contribute to improving the service we deliver. We will also seek to be more influential, continuing to use a robust voice to promote our work and contribute to on-going debates.

Our most important resource is always our people, and we will continue to find new ways to inspire and invest in development opportunities, creating a culture of collaboration and knowledge sharing. Building on the new hybrid ways of working will help us to create the best environment to do this.

We look forward to the next three years with a renewed optimism that we can become an even better organisation, that delivers more justice and more impact. We know that the enthusiasm to do this is shared by everyone who works at PHSO.

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 2021 / 22 business plan

Our achievements in 2021/22

Our previous three-year strategy came to an end in 2021. The ongoing effects of the pandemic meant that we took the decision to delay our new strategy and use 2021/22 as a bridging year.

During the last year, we consulted on our new strategy. The responses received were overwhelmingly positive and supportive of the ambition to harness the use of digital technology for greater efficiency and transparency, reach more people through direct engagement and give people an opportunity to help us improve the service we offer.

We continued to rebuild following the initial impact of COVID-19. Incoming complaints increased by 28%¹ above pre pandemic levels showing the need for our service remains as important as ever. The pandemic presented challenges in managing the queue of cases waiting to be considered. As result of a new approach to prioritising, in line with similar Ombuds schemes, and taking on additional employees, we reduced this queue from over 3200 to 2400.

Our dedicated and expert teams have published a number of important findings and recommendations from our casework. This includes critical reports on failures of government communication on changes to women's state pensions, and an investigation into the way UK Visas and Immigration handled the status of a member of the Windrush generation.

To further increase transparency and share learning, from April 2021, we started to routinely publish our casework and have plans to increase the number of publications in the coming year.

After a positive consultation process on our new NHS Complaints Standards, we have rolled out pilots of the programme that will support organisations in providing a quicker, simpler, and more streamlined complaint handling service. Building on the initial success of these standards we have begun the consultation on Government Complaints standards. The success of both projects will help us deliver our aim of better public services.

We continued to be an active member of the Ombudsman community. With COVID-19 affecting Ombuds schemes across the world, delegates from over 30 countries joined us for an event in Manchester. Participants shared learning and best practice of leading through crisis, and what could be learned from the pandemic. To accompany the event, we published the results of our survey of International Ombudsman Institutes on leadership through crisis in 'The Art of the Ombudsman', which looked at the challenges caused by the pandemic and the responses to them.

PHSO's dedicated people are our greatest asset. We have employed more people to deliver our service and in doing so made improvements to recruitment to better represent the people we serve. We have continued to focus on learning and development, such as professional accreditation for all senior caseworkers. After adapting to homeworking since March 2020, we are piloting new flexible working arrangements, while making sure everyone can work safely and well by providing equipment and support.

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 the heart is our new Transformation Portfolio, made up of three programmes which will substantially deliver the strategy: Access to Justice, Casework, and People and Culture. This section sets out the outline scope of those programmes and the key deliverables over the next three years. It also includes the wider change activities outside of the Transformation Portfolio which are key to delivering the strategy.

Each programme has a Senior Responsible Owner (SRO), accountable to the Transformation Board and the PHSO Board, who is deliberately not the business owner (the director responsible for the delivery of the given service). The SRO will work closely with the business owner. This is to promote objectivity, independence and collaboration in the management of the programmes.

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 set out in part 5.

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 how the strategy is delivered, both by the change activities in this business plan, and by our core business. The second table sets out the change activities, the associated key deliverables, and the resources required.

Strategic objective	Sub-objective	Delivered directly by:	Supported by:
1. People who use public services have a better awareness of the role of the Ombudsman and can easily access our service	1(a) We will remove barriers to our service	Access to Justice programme	People and Culture programme Smarter Working Data Strategy Maintaining the currency of our ICT systems
	1(b) We will improve public awareness of what we do and provide clarity about our role so service users can make informed choices	Access to Justice programme	
	1(c) We will focus our resources to make sure the right decision is made at the right time	Continuation of core business Casework programme End to End review Scaling up casework operations	
2. People we work with receive a high quality, empathetic and timely service, according to international Ombudsman principles	2(a) We embed the United Nations' Venice Principles on the protection and promotion of the Ombudsman Institute in our work	Casework programme	
	2(b) People who use our service experience best practice in complaint handling	Continuation of core business Casework programme End to End review Academy of Learning (internal) Scaling up casework operations	
	2(c) We will harness new technology to provide a more efficient, effective and inclusive service for people who work with us	Casework programme Data strategy	
3. We contribute to a culture of learning and continuous improvement, leading to high standards in public service	3(a) Our work leads to a better standard of complaint handling in organisations we investigate	Continuation of core business Complaint Standards Academy of Learning	
	3(b) Organisations we investigate are held to account for poor service provision and low standards of complaints handling	Continuation of core business	
	3(c) The Ombudsman has a credible, high profile voice for change and improvement in public services	Continuation of core business Thought Leadership	

Description and outline scope	Link to the strategy	Owner	Key deliverables			
			Q	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Access to Justice programme This programme will develop our outreach into different communities. 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, transforming ourselves into a user-led service. We will develop and build on effective partnerships with other sectors, such as NGOs, tribunal services and advocacy services to gain greater insights into the complaints they receive, and to develop effective signposting. We will establish a public and user panel	The access to justice programme will deliver objective 1 in our strategy: <i>People who use public services have a better awareness of the role of the Ombudsman and can easily access our service</i>	Senior Responsible Owner (SRO): Director of Operations and Quality Business Owner: Director of Strategy and Comms	1	Research and planning of outreach activity; scoping of partnerships	Continue delivery of outreach programme, embed new ways of working with priority audiences and transfer to BAU	Expand outreach to increased range of audiences.
			2			
			3	Engagement with partner organisations	Run networking events with partner organisations and strengthen intelligence sharing approaches, informing systemic casework	Embed new ways of working and transfer to BAU
			4	Engagement around public and user panel		
				Outreach activity; agree approaches to sharing of intelligence with partners	Pilot public and user panel	Evaluate

Description and outline scope	Link to the strategy	Owner	Key deliverables			
			Q	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Casework programme The casework programme will review and develop our casework operating model and delegation to reflect the changing operational context. Process 1- develop and implement process redesign, for example from the end to end review and a revised approach to systemic investigations using human factors); 2) process improvements as a result of reviewing how we consider and respond to breaches of human rights. Data and systems, identifying digital and technological solutions to transform customer service and casework efficiency including 1) Exploring the potential for automation and using artificial intelligence in case handling; 2) Developing a digital complaints service (linked to our case management system) to improve the accessibility and ease of use of our service, the sharing of case information and communication with complainants and organisations we investigate; 3) Improving the way we gather, record, analyse and use data to improve service delivery	The casework programme, together with and building on our ongoing core business of casework, is key to delivering objective 2 of our strategy: <i>People we work with receive a high quality, empathetic and timely service, according to international Ombudsman principles</i>	SRO: Director of Legal, Clinical and Data Business owner: Director of Operations and Quality	1	Scoping, definition and discovery work, including: Systemic Casework Strategy Business case for online service	Establish projects to deliver the required programme outputs Systemic Strategy	Complete implementation, embed new ways of working, transfer to BAU and evaluate
			2			
			3			
			4	Programme initiation		

Description and outline scope	Link to the strategy	Owner	Key deliverables			
			Q	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
<p>People and Culture programme</p> <p>This programme, together with the Smarter Working projects, will develop our people and our culture to enable us to provide an excellent service, and make PHSO a great place to work.</p> <p>The programme will develop and deliver a new People strategy, aligned to the PHSO Corporate Strategy and the new ICT and Digital Strategy, with a focus on developing our culture, policies and skills. Leadership will be central.</p> <p>The programme will deliver a new approach to recruitment and retention, to deliver our ambition of being an employer of choice. It will develop our approach to talent management, reward and recognition, and career progression, providing colleagues with the learning and development opportunities needed to build their skills. It will give managers the skills and the policies and processes to support excellent performance.</p>	The People and Culture programme is a business critical enabler that supports all aspects of the strategy.	<p>SRO: Director of Strategy and Comms</p> <p>Business owner: Interim Director of HR</p>	1	<p>Deliver Phase 2 of Exemplary Leaders and Managers programme (ongoing through year). Develop next phase of leadership development</p> <p>Research and development of People strategy</p> <p>Draft and agree new HR policies</p>	Commence implementation of the People strategy, including ICT and people management training.	Complete implementation of the People strategy, embed new ways of working and transfer to BAU
			2			
			3			
			4			

Description and outline scope	Link to the strategy	Owner	Key deliverables			
			Q	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Scaling up casework operations Managing increased demand for our service. The number of complaints we receive has increased by 28% since 2018/19 ² . Our own service has been affected by COVID-19 over the past two years, increasing our response times and requiring us to prioritise. Alongside the Casework programme described above, we will expand our casework teams to manage increased demand and more complicated complaints and restore our service over time to our pre-pandemic standards	The scaling up of casework operations, alongside the Casework programme, will deliver objective 2 of our strategy: <i>People we work with receive a high quality, empathetic and timely service, according to international Ombudsman principles</i>	Director of Operations and Quality	1 2	We have expanded our casework teams by a further 36 posts, on top of the 14 posts we added in the first half of 2012/22. The extra 36 posts are being recruited to in Q4 of 2021/22 and Q1 of 2022/23. The impact of the new posts will be reported through our performance against our casework KPIs (see section 5)		
End to End review The End to End review of our casework process was completed in 2021/22. We will implement improvements to our existing process identified by the review	Objective 2	Director of Operations and Quality	1 2	Scope project and identify changes to existing process to be delivered Identify service redesign proposals to evaluate as part of casework programme		
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	Our work in developing and promoting complaints standards and the Academy of Learning is part of delivering	Assistant Director of Professional Standards and Partnerships	1 2 3 4	Evaluate and report on NHS pilots Roll out NHS complaint standards Consult on government complaint standards	Evaluate and report on NHS standards Pilot government complaint standards	Roll out government complaint standards Evaluate

Description and outline scope	Link to the strategy	Owner	Key deliverables			
			Q	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
<p>Academy of Learning</p> <p>We will build an Academy of Learning that will further embed our professional learning and accreditation programme for our staff</p> <p>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</p>	<p>objective 3(a) <i>Our work leads to a better standard of complaint handling in organisations we investigate.</i></p> <p>Within PHSO, the Academy of Learning also contributes to objective 2</p>	<p>Assistant Director of Professional Standards and Partnerships</p>	<p>1 2 3 4</p>	<p>Scoping and research to determine the feasibility of training and accreditation for organisations in jurisdiction and define the model, structure and processes</p>	<p>Implement internal and NHS training</p>	<p>Complete implementation, embed new ways of working, transfer to BAU and evaluate</p>
<p>Thought leadership</p> <p>We will develop thought leadership based on our casework and on our expertise as a public service Ombudsman including on lessons learned from the pandemic and on reasonable expectations of public services and the relationship between the provider and citizen</p>	<p>Our thought leadership work will support Objective 3(c) <i>The Ombudsman has a credible, high profile voice for change and improvement in public services</i></p>	<p>Assistant Director of Comms</p>	<p>2</p>	<p>Scoping and piloting of a Thought Leadership programme</p>	<p>Embed new ways of working and transfer to BAU by Q4</p>	
<p>Smarter Working project</p> <p>Smarter Working will provide PHSO colleagues with IT and office accommodation which enables us to deliver our ambitions and helps to make PHSO a great place to work.</p> <p>The ICT Roadmap project is delivering the IT tools for hybrid working and collaboration; we will develop our working practices to realise the full benefit of those tools.</p>	<p>Smarter Working is a business critical enabler that supports all aspects of the strategy.</p>	<p>Interim Director of Resources</p>	<p>1 2</p>	<p>Research and development of strategy</p> <p>Complete the ICT Roadmap Delivery to embed new functionality delivered in 2021/22 and deliver new Microsoft 365 functionality for Smarter Working</p>	<p>Implementation of the new ICT strategy</p>	<p>Complete implementation, embed new ways of working and transfer to BAU</p>

Description and outline scope	Link to the strategy	Owner	Key deliverables			
			Q	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
<p>We will update our ICT and Digital strategy, last approved in January 2019, with a focus on digitising our service and considering the benefits of artificial intelligence in casework and across the business.</p> <p>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.</p>				Upgrades to tools and infrastructure to support hybrid working (throughout 2022/23)		
			3	Decisions on future London and Manchester office space		
			4	Approval of the new ICT and Digital strategy by the Board		
<p>Data strategy</p> <p>We will implement the Data Strategy, delivering new tools and developing staff to improve the way we collect, control, use, and report data, increasing the quality of our data, insights and service.</p>	<p>The delivery of the Data Strategy is a business critical enabler. Several elements of our strategy depend on relevant, reliable and accessible data, and our ability to use data effectively, in particular Objective 2(c) <i>We will harness new technology to provide a more efficient, effective and inclusive service for people who work with us</i></p>	<p>Director of Legal, Clinical and Data</p>	1	<p>Develop and deliver new data analysis and reporting tools and upskill staff in their use (throughout 2022/23)</p>	<p>Embed the new data models and tools and identify further priorities for development</p>	
			2			
			3			
			4			
Maintaining the currency of our ICT	These are all business critical		1	Implement new intranet	Evaluate intranet and HR system	

Description and outline scope	Link to the strategy	Owner	Key deliverables			
			Q	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
<p>We will implement the new HR system</p> <p>The platform for the intranet was bought and delivered in 2021/22. We will develop the content and functionality to improve the quality of the system, usability and staff satisfaction</p> <p>The Finance system will be replaced in 2023/24</p>	enablers which support delivery of our strategy and service.	Interim Director of Resources	2	Embed new intranet Implement new HR system	Procure and implement new finance system	
			3	Embed new HR system		
			4	Research options for new finance system		

Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

Citygate
Mosley Street
Manchester
M23HQ
United Kingdom

If you would like this document in a different format, such as Daisy or large print, please contact us.

Telephone: 0345 015 4033

Textphone: 0300 061 4298

Fax: 0300 0614000

Email: phso.enquiries@ombudsman.org.uk

www.ombudsman.org.uk

Follow us on:



iTunes



Spotify