

Radio Ombudsman: The challenges of being an Ombudsman

Podcast transcription

Rob Behrens: Hello, this is Rob Behrens here. Welcome to Radio Ombudsman. My special guest today is Michael, or Mick King who is, as you know, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

Well, Mick, you are very welcome.

Mick King: Thanks for having me.

Rob Behrens: I know Mick well, we serve ex-officio as non-executives on each other's boards and I have learnt a lot from my involvement in Mick's organisation.

Mick, there has been a long tradition in this country of appointing ombudsmen from the list of the great and the good, and also appointing people from outside the work of ombudsman, so they begin not being familiar with the key issues. This is beginning to change on both fronts, and you are a great example of this change in both respects. So, tell us a bit about your background, where you were born and brought up?

Mick King: Well, as you say, I don't think I was ever on the list of either the great or the good. I was born in Liverpool. I grew up in North Liverpool and I came from, I suppose what we call a hard-working family these days. I went to a comprehensive school and I had a very normal background. My early work – I

was an apprentice Weights and Measure Inspector for Newcastle City Council. So, I suppose I have come from what would be classed as a very normal background.

Rob Behrens: You had a long career in public service before you joined the Local Government Office?

Mick King: Absolutely. I was involved in public protection services of local government up in the North East of England. That ranged across a whole wide variety of different public protection issues. From dealing with loan sharks and car clockers, through to looking up the safety of toys and investigating the avoidable deaths of children from unsafe toys and other products. So, I worked for 15 years in public protection of one sort or another. I suppose if there is one thing that has characterised my working life it has been around trying to seek justice for people.

Rob Behrens: I'm sorry, what is a car-clocker?

Mick King: Somebody who turns back the mileage on a car in order to make it look more attractive to somebody who is going to buy it.

Rob Behrens: So, you are not part of the great and the good. But, you worked for the Local Government Ombudsman for a long time before you became the ombudsman. I think you first joined the LGO in 2004. What was it like in those early days?

Mick King: I think the organisation has changed a huge amount. I joined as Deputy Ombudsman and in those days, we had three ombudsmen rather than one. I think it is fair to say that the organisation hadn't changed a great deal since it was set up in 1974. In the time I have been there we have gone through a huge change. I mean three of the big pieces of work I have been involved in are trying to increase public access to the ombudsman scheme. So, I was involved in setting up our first public advice service back in 2006 and enabling people to complain by phone. Unbelievably, you could only complain by sending in a form up until that point.

I was involved in expanding our jurisdiction from just looking at public bodies to looking at private bodies who are delivering public services. So, we expanded to look at the whole of private sector social care in 2010. Bringing in 26,000 care providers in the independent sector.

More recently we have done a lot of work around how we can be more transparent, more accountable. So, I led a piece of work for us to publish every single one of our complaint decisions. We currently have about 36,000 decisions on our website – that is whether we uphold a decision or not, to try and make the service a bit more transparent.

So, in the last decade the service has changed beyond all recognition.

Rob Behrens: I want to ask you a bit about transparency and what that means in terms of public trust a bit later on. It hasn't always been plain sailing with the Local Government Ombudsman, and I think it is right to say there was a crisis of public confidence a few years ago. What was that about?

Mick King: I think partly the governance that we had in the organisation was complex and old fashioned. Basically, you had three ombudsmen and three deputy ombudsmen, all of whom really had to agree to change something before it would ever happen. So, you didn't have the kind of modern governance that you would expect in a public body. We changed all of that.

I think, also, we were too inward looking. We weren't sufficiently listening to the people we served, nor were we doing enough to share the lessons from our complaints with an external audience. So, I think the big things that have changed are, we have got a single ombudsman now – me, I am the Chief Executive – and a board that work in a more recognisable way, like a modern organisation.

I think partly it was a cultural change, that we are much more focussed on providing a good service to the public and to the bodies that are in our jurisdiction, so that they can learn from complaints.

Rob Behrens: Okay, so I think it is right that the three ombudsmen were in three different cities in three different parts of the country?

Mick King: Absolutely. It was organised like Saxon fiefdoms where you had an 'Ombudsman of the North', one 'of the South' and one 'of the Midlands'. (Laughs)

Rob Behrens: Now, it is all under your responsibility?

Mick King: It is, but I am very much against the idea of having one leader who claims to know it all. I certainly don't. So, it is very much

about having a very democratic organisation, very flat management structure and a huge amount of delegation to staff on the front line. I mean, we live or die by how good the staff we employ are. Fortunately, we have got some fantastic investigators, and they have got my full confidence. I give them full delegation to be able to make decisions on my behalf.

Rob Behrens: I mean, people listening will raise their eyebrows at the idea of a democratic organisation. What does that mean?

Mick King: I think that we try to be a learning organisation where we are reflective and humble about what we do. We try and make sure that we listen to both the voice of people who use our service, but also that we listen to each other within the organisation. I don't think it is healthy for one person – you have got a lot of power invested in you as ombudsman, you have got to share that in order to make the organisation work properly. I think that if you hold all that power to yourself, and you try and be too controlling then you distort the service. You can't possibly be the font of all knowledge. You have got to share the responsibility and you have got to share the authority with your staff and work as a team.

Rob Behrens: What about the relationship with complainants? Is there a particular Local Government Ombudsman and Social Care Ombudsman style to this?

Mick King: There is, I mean I think one of the lessons we learnt when we had some problems seven or eight years ago was that I think we had stopped listening to our complainants enough. One of

the things that we set up at the time was a user panel where we invite former complainants. Every year we get a different group of former complainants to come meet with us, tell us about their experience of using our service. That can be a very frank and robust discussion.

I think the thing I take away from every single group we have met with is that we try to run a nice neat objective process in the ombudsman scheme and sometimes we forget how much of a journey people have been on to reach us. Often people have spent months, if not years fighting to try and get their problem resolved. What we have got to do is try and be compassionate and empathetic, to understand that people come with baggage. They don't come ready to involve themselves in a simple clean process.

Rob Behrens: So, how do your case handlers get the skills to deal with those kinds of issues?

Mick King: Well, I think it is something that we are still working on. I think it is one of the greatest challenges for an ombudsman scheme that you need to have two apparently quite different skills at the same time.

On the one hand you need to be very objective, very cold and analytical and at the same time, you need to be warm and empathetic without losing your independence. I think trying to have those two things at the same time, lots of our staff do embody that, they do achieve that, but I think that is the real challenge behind an ombudsman scheme.

I think there is a lot of focus, often, on process issues. But, actually I think it is a cultural issue, about how can you be both

analytical and empathetic in one person at the same time. I think that is the existential challenge that we have.

Rob Behrens: So, it's an existential challenge, but do you believe that an ombudsman is a profession, or an embryonic profession? And, if you don't, do you think it should be?

Mick King: I think it absolutely should be a profession. I think when I joined the organisation there was still remnants of its past as very much, what you might call, 'gentlemen amateurs'. The vast majority of staff that worked for us at that time were modern, professional staff, but there was still a whiff of a different culture which I think is where some ombudsman schemes came from in the past. I absolutely think that this is a professional set of skills that people need. The challenge is that there aren't off-the-shelf qualifications, there aren't off-the-shelf packages through which you can recruit people. But, seeing this as a professional service is absolutely the way forward.

Rob Behrens: And that is where the bodies like the Ombudsman Association and the Public Service Ombudsman group come in?

Mick King: Absolutely. I think that the ombudsman schemes operate in a unique space in the administrative justice landscape. I think the more that we can support each other to develop, the better. Not just within the UK, I mean there are some very strong links between ombudsmen here in the UK, but I think there are incredible models in the rest of the world. In South Africa and in Europe where ombudsman schemes are frankly

doing a service which we pale in comparison to them. So, I think there is a huge amount we can learn, and I think we should be humble enough to do that, learning from schemes across the world.

Rob Behrens: I agree with that. Let me just go back to something you said about taking on private social care. There is a challenge to you, in that there is still a split between you and the Housing Ombudsman, isn't there? What kind of impact does that have?

Mick King: Well, interestingly I suppose people would think that your scheme and mine, in terms of social care and health, would be the biggest overlap in public sector ombudsmanry. It's interesting, when you look at the statistics in our contact centre we get three times as many misdirected calls for the Housing Ombudsman as we do in relation to health complaints. Which shows the level of public confusion that there is around housing services. It is a significant problem that I don't think people do know where to turn in relation to social housing. The way in which the Housing Ombudsman and ourselves operate is quite distinct. That is a significant issue and I know the Government is going to bring forward a consultation on redressing the housing market as a whole. So, maybe there is an opportunity there to look at that.

Rob Behrens: We invite Twitter users to submit questions, and we have had a bevy of questions to you. One of them addresses the issue we were just talking about. Someone on Twitter says, 'The problem facing the public is that there is no single complaint system. You find yourself spending hours trying to divide
PARLIAMENTARY AND HEALTH SERVICE OMBUDSMAN

and local government ombudsman complaints when there is no real divide. Until a single complaint system is put in place, you are wasting your time and effort.' Do you agree with that?

Mick King: We might want to talk separately about some of the things we are trying to do short of creating a single ombudsman, but just to address that issue head on, I think there is a nexus between adult social care, health, housing, benefits, where I completely agree with the person who has posed the question. Where, to try and look at those things through the two jurisdictions that PARLIAMENTARY AND HEALTH SERVICE OMBUDSMAN have, the two jurisdictions that LGO have and the jurisdictions that the Housing Ombudsman has is not a sensible way forward. You wouldn't start from here if you were going to design an English public sector ombudsman scheme today.

There is a model we can follow though, in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, where our colleagues there have a joined-up ombudsman scheme which looks not only at those issues, but looks at a wide range of other public services and public goods as well. So, I think that the kind of model that exists elsewhere in the UK. I think English citizens should be entitled to the same type of redress systems that you get, say, in Northern Ireland which I think at the moment sets the gold standard within the UK.

So, I wholly agree. I think, though, that in the mean time we shouldn't just be sitting on our hands waiting for legislation. We are and should continue to work together to try and make sure that we offer as joined up a service as we possibly can.

Rob Behrens: Okay, I want to move onto that. But before I do, let me just go back to your point about gentleman amateurs. Are you in

agreement with those who say 'ombudsman' is not a gender-neutral term and should be replaced?

Mick King: The Swedish ombudsman told me it was a gender-neutral term, so, I am happy to take her view on it. I am sure she knows more about Scandinavian languages than I do, but I think the big problem with the term is that it is already not well understood. I think that if we start to try and create a sub-set of that term, I think it is going to be even more confusing for the public.

Perhaps the solution here is to move away altogether – I mean in Spanish speaking countries the officer is called the 'Defender of the People' and in South Africa it is 'The Public Protector.' So, maybe the term 'ombudsman' is a problem in itself and maybe we should just look at something which speaks in plain English about what it is that we do.

Rob Behrens: I agree with you to the extent that I find Public Protector in the South African model – that is quite attractive really, and it is something that we need to debate.

Okay, so in terms of what you have to offer your colleagues in the ombudsman sector about good practice, you have mentioned some things already. You have mentioned your transparency policy which I know is very impressive. What does that bring in terms of public benefit? Is it the case that you publish all the decisions that you resolve in a year?

Mick King: Absolutely. Virtually all the decisions. The only ones we don't publish are ones where we think it might compromise the anonymity of the claimants. So, a small number we don't

publish for that reason. But, the vast majority of the 12,000 decisions we make each year we will publish. That will include large numbers of decisions where we have decided that we can't investigate for one reason or another.

There was a big debate in our organisation about whether that was a good thing to publish those or not, because potentially they could be seen as quite a negative outcome.

One of the things we are very keen to do, though, is create a much better and a much more full picture for the public and for our bodies in our jurisdiction of exactly what the range of decisions we make is.

So, actually one of the ways of helping people to understand what they are in for if they come to the ombudsman, is that they can actually look at the decisions in advance. You can search on our website by the name of your Local Authority and by the type of the complaint you are looking at. So, actually you can probably look in advance at 10 or 12 decisions about pretty much the same thing and get an idea of:

(1) Will we be able to look at it?

and

(2) What sort of range of outcomes might we get?

I think that is quite important because people sometimes assume that they are going to get a PPI claim type of treatment at the ombudsman and absolutely that is not what we are here for. So, partly one of the big driving forces of publishing everything was to be accountable and transparent, but also it is to try and give people a true sense of what it is that we do.

Rob Behrens: So, you would say that transparency helps you to educate your users?

Mick King: It does, and I think it also helps to make sure that the quality of what we are doing is right. We did about a three-year project when we were going to publish our complaints to make sure that we improved the quality and consistency of the final product of the decision statements.

There is an old saying, isn't there, that 'sunlight is the best disinfectant'. I think that is partly what motivated us, that actually by putting these decisions in the public domain, they are not checked by anybody, this is the actual decision that goes from the investigator to the complainant. There is no secondary checking, there is no editing, this is the letter which is on our website which is the same letter that would have been received by the complainant. So, every one of our investigators knows that whenever they make a decision, that will be in the public domain. I think that is an important discipline.

Rob Behrens: So, it also helps you additionally to demystify the process and makes it clear that ombudsmen are not just champions of the complainant.

Mick King: Absolutely, yes. As I say of those 12,000 decisions, maybe 6,000 of those will be us saying that either for jurisdictional reasons, or discretionary reasons we might not be able to investigate that complaint. So, it shows both sides. It is also a resource for elected members and local authorities who can use that to hold their own authority to account and see how

their authority is performing. So, it is part of democratic scrutiny.

It is also a resource for officers in local authorities. We have a strong network of link officers who deal with complaints coming into local authorities and we know from conversations with them that they use this encyclopaedia of cases when they are trying to sort out a case. They will look at what sort of decisions we have made in the past and that will often mean that they don't need to refer the case to us, they will sort it out themselves on the same sort of basis.

Rob Behrens: Yes. So, did you have any kick back from local authorities? In terms of their fear about their reputation as a result of this process?

Mick King: Well interestingly we didn't. We expected that we might, but I think that local authorities are subject to so much legislation requiring them to be open and transparent about what they do, that I think part of their culture is to accept that this is the way that they have to do business. So, we didn't really get any push-back at all from local authorities.

We also expected that the media may selectively pick on cases that we published and distort the picture of what we did, but again that hasn't happened. So, a lot of the risks that we were trying to mitigate when we went down this path actually haven't manifested themselves. It has been a wholly positive experience.

Rob Behrens: Do you believe that ombudsmen should be highlighting good practice as well as poor practice?

Mick King:

Absolutely. I think that an ombudsman has got two roles fundamentally. The first is to provide justice for the individual. The second, though, is to do something with the learning from complaints to help drive service improvements. Part of that has to be being reflective about those authorities who perhaps have performed well in response to particular recommendations you've made.

We do an annual letter to every single local authority in the country every year reporting back to them our experience of their complaint handling. That letter used to be either neutral or negative, so those authorities who weren't causing us any difficulties would get a neutral letter, the ones who we had particular concerns about we would say. Again these are published letters, so not behind closed doors.

For the first time last year I decided we should also say some positive things where we could. So, authorities who had invested in complaints training and authorities who had responded positively to recommendations we've made we have said that in the letter and publicly commended them for that. Clearly, that is a challenging thing to do. One, because complaints aren't a great lens for seeing good practice by their very nature. But, also, I think people wouldn't expect us to say something positive. I think they expect us to be just critical. So, it is a break with the way we have worked in the past, but I think it is important to be even handed.

Rob Behrens:

Okay, so let's just get a bit personal for a minute. What would you say is the most difficult thing you have had to do as ombudsman?

Mick King: I genuinely enjoy all of the case work because I think it is (1) so worthwhile, and (2) it is absolutely fascinating. So, I don't think, no matter how difficult the case, I don't think I find that uncomfortable. I think the difficult thing as ombudsman, though, is that if you are doing the right thing you will upset lots of people lots of the time. So, I think being able to hold your nerve and keep on doing the right thing in the face of what is inevitably a fairly full on constant criticism both from the bodies in your jurisdiction and the people who complain to you. I think that is the most challenging thing, and you have got to be fairly resilient and you have got to be fairly focussed on what is the right thing to do in the face of lots of forces which are trying to push you along a different path.

Rob Behrens: How do you cope with that? With that criticism?

Mick King: I suppose I have worked in public sector roles which have involved criminal enforcement or making quasi-judicial decisions for 30 years. So, I have kind of become used to it. But, I think also having a strong sense of what you believe to be right, and what you think the role is all about is important. But, I think also, working with other colleagues in the sector who occupy the same role and getting support from other people in the ombudsman sector is really important, so that you don't go mad on your own. (Laughs)

Rob Behrens: That is another reason why the network of ombudsmen, the Ombudsman Association, the International Association is so important in making sure you have got someone to talk to, who understands.

Mick King: Absolutely, yes. I think that it can be a lonely job at times. I think it is important that you can sometimes test your thinking with somebody else who is working in a different context just to make sure you are still on the right track.

Rob Behrens: Okay, thank you. Let's move on to ombudsman reform. Ombudsman reform has been on the table for a very long time. The prospects of a single public services ombudsman ebbs and flows like the tide. Some people might say that it is like hunting the snark. It disappears suddenly. Do you think the principle of a single joined up Public Service Ombudsman is sound and deliverable?

Mick King: I do. As I said before, I think the overlaps between different aspects of health, housing, social care, make that a very sensible thing to do. I mean, interestingly in the sectors that we respectively look at you have the sustainability and transformation plans, you have combined authorities which are actually joining up those services on the ground. As you pointed out earlier on, you have housing associations who are also social care providers. So, the reality on the ground that the public experience is not split into the silos which the ombudsman are. So, I think in principal it has got to be the right thing. I don't think at any cost though.

Rob Behrens: Would you give some time to those people who say that it is okay in Northern Ireland, or Scotland, or Wales, but these are jurisdictions with very small populations in comparison to

England? In big European countries joined up ombudsmen don't exist.

Mick King: I think the fact that they don't exist in some parts of Europe is probably a little bit like the English situation. It is a product of history and of development, so I wouldn't think it is necessarily for thought out rational reasons. Things have evolved in the way they have. There are certainly lots of other countries around the world who do have a single ombudsman scheme.

I think the question of scale is an interesting one, but the reality is my scheme already operates at the English scale looking at the whole of local government and at the whole of social care. Your scheme operates at the national scale looking at the whole of health. So, we are already demonstrating that it is possible to operate at the scale of looking at England as a whole. I don't see why it wouldn't be possible to do that for other services.

So, I don't think that is a barrier. I think more of a barrier, really, is making sure that a proposal for a single ombudsman actually delivers something new. I think if it was purely about an administrative merger of different public bodies, I think that is (1) a missed opportunity, and (2) a really incredibly dull way of going about change. I think any change has got to be driven from the public perspective, not from the perspective of moving around different public bodies and the boundaries around them. I think if that was what we were in to, then I don't think that is going to deliver a great deal of change.

Rob Behrens: So, in terms of powers then, what would you want to see in a Bill that isn't in the current draft?

Mick King:

Obviously I welcome the current draft. As you say, the tide comes in and out on creating a single public service ombudsman, and I think that established a new high-water mark. But, the tide does appear to be receding again. I think that gives us an opportunity to revisit the draft Bill and I think there are things that could make it stronger. Partly for me, I think it is about scope. I think the scope in the draft Bill is very much the existing jurisdictions of the two bodies involved. I think that missed the point.

I think what we should be looking for is some sort of principle of universality, where public services and public goods – irrespective of what they are – you have got the right to complain to the public ombudsman and get an independent investigation when things have gone wrong and that there is some sort of over-arching scrutiny. So, an area such as schools' complaints, we can look at everything up to the door of the school. We can look at school exclusions, school transport, but we can't look inside the school.

We did a pilot jurisdiction for that, which was hugely successful, yet there is no proper mechanism for independent scrutiny of complaints there now. So, I think defining the scope of a new scheme to include things like education and housing have been important.

I think getting the governance right is important. You absolutely have to protect the independence of the ombudsman, but you also need to have modern accountability. I think the governance is a very tricky issue, I don't claim to know the answer to it. I think that needs looking at again.

And, I think there needs to be more emphasis as well on the role of the ombudsman, not just as a dispute resolution

service, but as a body that is part of the warp and weft of public accountability and democratic scrutiny that is holding bodies to account in the public domain, and is feeding back lessons to improve public services. I think I would like to see that strengthened in any future Bill, but also powers...

Rob Behrens: So, you wouldn't want to see adjudication lost in the creation of this new institution. But, would you want to see own initiative powers?

Mick King: Well I used to be a sceptic...

Rob Behrens: Sorry, when we talk about own initiative powers, what we mean is that the ombudsman can decide whether or not to investigate rather than relying on an individual complaint.

Mick King: I used to be somewhat sceptical about the need for it. We have got a power at the moment in our legislation that allows us to broaden an investigation where we think other people have been affected. We use that to good effect where we see one person in a local authority has been affected by a bad policy, we might broaden that out, solve the same problem for 500 people, and then do a national report that changes that policy nationally.

So, I was sceptical for those reasons. But, having talked to colleagues who have this power around the world, I am increasingly convinced that I think it should be part of the ombudsman's tool box. A good example for me is in our social care jurisdiction. We know that it is very, very difficult if you are

an elderly person receiving care in a care home or in your own home, if you don't have family to speak up for you it is very difficult for you to make a complaint. It takes a huge amount of courage and we have seen examples of people being victimised as a result of raising a complaint.

I think if we had own initiative powers somebody could come to us and effectively make an anonymous complaint. They could come, complain to us about what was going on in that care setting. We could then, rather than having to name them, we could do an own initiative investigation to look into that, where perhaps they would be very, very vulnerable if we were to have to name that person. So, increasingly I think that it is part of the tool box of most ombudsman around the world, and I think it probably should be here too.

Rob Behrens: Okay, thank you for that. The final question about this is, who knows when we are going to get the legislative time for this, in the meantime are there a set of things that you and I should be doing to bring about convergence, or is that a chimerical view?

Mick King: I think we should, yes. The most important thing we are doing together already, although it is very much in embryonic form at the moment, is that we have a joint working team where we are both given delegations of the same group of staff. So, somebody might, you know... a typical situation of somebody who has gone into hospital in crisis and then is discharged into social care. In that one life incident they might pass through six or seven different ombudsman jurisdictions, which is an insane situation.

Though our joint working team we can look at those bodies, or one investigator or one complaint can look at six or seven

different public and private bodies that have been involved in that person's care. I think that is a wonderful model and I think we haven't got it working in quite the way we want yet, but I think if we invest in that and grow that, I think that is a model for the future in terms of what we can achieve without legislation.

I think, though, that our organisations already have a huge amount in common. So I very much hope that we can continue to build and grow together, and increasingly work in very similar ways so that actually the gap between us is smaller and smaller as the years go by.

Rob Behrens: Okay, thank you. Two more questions. One from Twitter. Quite an assertive question. Do you use gagging orders on FOI [freedom of information] requests to hide your alleged failings?

Mick King: No, I am not even sure what a gagging order on an FOI request is? (Laughs) No, I mean we deal with FOI and data protection requests in a very open way. Our view is that somebody's case file is their file, so if somebody asks to see their file, unless that information is confidential we will give them everything in the file.

When somebody asks for freedom of information requests about the organisation as a whole - a typical one that we used to get now and again was, "How many people in our local organisation used to work in local government?" Totally legitimate request to make sure that we are not... every single person in our organisation isn't fresh out of our local council. We will give that information if we hold it, so our touch stone really with FOI, DPA [Data Protection Act] and anything else is

to try and be as transparent as we possibly can, whilst at the same time protecting people's confidential data.

Rob Behrens: Okay. Thank you. And finally, you don't want administrative merger, which I agree with. But, what do you think an ideal ombudsman service looks like? What are its main characteristics?

Mick King: I think the first characteristics of an ideal ombudsman always have to be independence. Without that everything else is lost. It has to be independent, which means that it can do robust, impartial investigations, give fair redress for individuals and hold bodies to account publicly.

Part of that is being willing to speak truth unto power and to expose some uncomfortable truths from time to time. That has got to be at the heart of it. To achieve that, I think it has got to be enshrined in statute. It has got to be protected by parliament. But, also, it has to have adequate powers and resources to be able to do its job. I think that they are sometimes less obvious ways in which independence of ombudsman can be eroded.

My own scheme has been cut by over 40% in the last ten years. That makes it incredibly difficult to do the job, and I know we are not doing things that I would like us to do. So, I think independence has got to be lived as well as being on the statue book. It has got to be backed with resources and powers to be able to do the job.

I think, as well, the Northern Ireland Ombudsman used a great expression the other day to distinguish the type of ombudsman scheme we both are from consumer dispute resolution. She

called it a 'public interest ombudsman'. I think that was a very good way of capturing it, because I think that an ombudsman scheme like ours has to do more than simply resolve individual disputes in a transactional way. If all we do is that then we are not good value for money and we are not doing the whole job.

We have got to also find some way of systematically mining our data to identify bodies who are failing and identify themes which we can feed back into public debate so that helps to improve public services. So, I think having that dual role is really, really important if you are a public interest ombudsman. I think that you have got to be part of the warp and weft of democratic scrutiny and public accountability. Whether that is for traditional public services, or for public goods which are delivered by other means. So, I don't think we should limit ourselves purely to looking at public services delivered in the public sector. I think the role is a wider one than that these days.

Rob Behrens: Okay. Well Mick, so much there. We could continue for hours and will do when the broadcast finishes. But, thank you for your time. Thank you for an eloquent, frank exchange, and we are very grateful.

Can I just remind our listeners that our next guest will be Sarah Barclay, who is the founder of the Medical Mediation Foundation, and one of the leading lights in Europe on developing mediation in the health service. So, if you have questions for Sarah please look at our [Twitter account](#) and submit your questions and we will be happy to put them to her. In the meantime, have a good day and thank you very much.