

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster



Sent via email

19 May 2020

Dear Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster,

I am contacting you in relation to the Government's planning around any review(s) of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic so that improvements can be made to policy and practice across the public sector.

While PHSO currently continues to accept complaints about parliamentary bodies, we have paused temporarily our work on health complaints to reduce the pressure on the NHS frontline during the crisis. Our telephone lines remain open and we are documenting and giving advice on all COVID-19 related inquiries. These include (for example) cancelled cancer treatments and allegations of avoidable death. When the pause ends, we expect to receive a large number of complaints from individuals across both our health and parliamentary jurisdictions related to the action taken by public bodies during the pandemic.

I would welcome a discussion with one of your Ministerial team about Government plans to review how public bodies have responded to the pandemic. In particular, I need to understand the structure and independence of the framework being considered for any review(s) to be established. It would also be useful to know how you plan to incorporate citizen's personal experiences, whether in health and social care settings or more widely, such as accessing the expanded benefit system or the struggles some faced in returning to the UK from overseas.

Such a discussion will help inform my own planning for which complaints we prioritise, and what systemic reviews PHSO undertakes (possibly in collaboration with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman). This is an area that I will be discussing with the Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, who is copied into this letter.

In relation to systemic review, you may also wish to know that I am working with the International Ombudsman Institute (IOI) to disseminate, in the coming weeks, a survey of 150 national ombudsman offices to document the variety of actions being taken to respond to and learn from the pandemic. I will publish the findings in the coming months.



My independent position in relation to the investigation of complaints about health and other public bodies, enables me to make a useful contribution to thinking about Government reviews into the response to the pandemic, so I look forward to a positive reply. Faye Glover, my Assistant Private Secretary at faye.glover@ombudsman.org.uk would be happy to help to arrange an appropriate meeting.

Yours sincerely,

Rob Behrens

Rob Behrens CBE
Ombudsman and Chair
Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

Cc William Wragg, MP, Chair, PACAC
Michael King, Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.
Elisabeth Davies, Senior Non-Executive, PHSO.



Millbank Tower
Millbank
London SW1P 4QP

Telephone: 0300 061 4308
Email: Rob.Behrens@ombudsman.org.uk
www.ombudsman.org.uk