

## The Work of the Office

The Office currently has around 400 employees based at our two sites in London (Millbank) and Manchester.

Complaints about government departments and other public bodies are referred to us through MPs, while those about the National Health Service in England are usually received direct. From 1 April 2009, following the abolition of the Healthcare Commission, there is a two-stage system for dealing with NHS complaints, with PHSO becoming the second and final complaint handler.

During the 2008 to 09 business year, the latest year for which published figures are available, we received 16,317 enquiries; we accepted 401 cases for investigation (162 parliamentary and 239 health). During 2007 to 2008 the largest numbers of parliamentary complaints were about HM Revenue & Customs, the Department for Work and Pensions, the Ministry of Justice and the Home Office. Most health complaints were about the Healthcare Commission.

When an investigation leads to a complaint being upheld, the Ombudsman seeks appropriate redress for any unremedied injustice or hardship suffered by the complainant. That may involve an explanation of what went wrong, an apology, changes in procedures to prevent problems recurring in the future and, where appropriate, financial compensation.

Recent reports published by the Ombudsman:

- *Putting things right: complaints and learning from DWP* (Department for Work and Pensions) was published in March 2009. It gives examples of complaints investigated by the Ombudsman about DWP and its agencies.
- *Six Lives: the provision of public services to people with learning disabilities* was published in March 2009. It sets out the details of six investigations of complaints made by Mencap on behalf of the families of people with learning disabilities who died while in NHS care.
- *Improving public service: a matter of principle* was published in December 2008. The report gives examples of cases investigated by the Ombudsman which clearly illustrate good or poor practice in dealing with complaints from members of the public.
- *Equitable Life: a decade of regulatory failure*, the Ombudsman's report into the prudential regulation of the Equitable Life Assurance Society in the period to December 2001, was published in July 2008. The 3,000-page report is the result of a 4-year investigation which is arguably the most complex and wide-ranging investigation ever undertaken by the Office.
- *Remedy in the NHS* (published in June 2008) gives examples of cases investigated by the Ombudsman and illustrates the various ways in which the Ombudsman provides remedy.
- *Tax Credits; Getting it wrong?* (published October 2007) reported on HM Revenue & Customs' administration of tax credits. This report followed on from the Ombudsman's previous report *Tax credits: Putting Things Right* in June 2005.

## The Ombudsman's role, vision and values

PHSO exists to:

*'provide a service to the public by undertaking independent investigations into complaints that government departments, a range of public bodies in the UK, and the NHS in England, have not acted properly or fairly or have provided a poor service.'*

Our vision is:

*'to provide an independent, high quality complaint handling service that rights individual wrongs, drives improvements in public services and informs public policy.'*

Our values shape our behaviour, both as an organisation and as individuals working at PHSO and incorporate our Principles of Good Administration.

**Excellence:** We pursue excellence in all that we do in order to provide the best possible service:

- We seek feedback to achieve learning and continuous improvement.
- We operate thorough and rigorous processes to reach sound, evidence-based judgments.
- We are committed to enabling and developing our staff so that they can provide an excellent service.

**Leadership:** We lead by example and believe our work should have a positive impact:

- We set high standards for ourselves and others.
- We are an exemplar and provide expert advice in complaint handling.
- We share learning to achieve improvement.

**Integrity:** We are open, honest and straightforward in all our dealings, and use time, money and resources effectively:

- We are consistent and transparent in all our actions and decisions.
- We take responsibility for our actions and hold ourselves accountable for all that we do.
- We treat people fairly.

**Diversity:** We value people and their diversity and strive to be inclusive:

- We respect others, regardless of personal differences.
- We listen to people to understand their needs and tailor our service accordingly.
- We promote equal access to our service for all members of the community.

## Governance

The Ombudsman, Ann Abraham, is appointed by the Queen and is directly accountable to Parliament. She is independent of the Government and the NHS, and is solely responsible and accountable for the conduct and administration of all work carried out by the Office and for the decision made in each case.

### **The Executive Board**

The Executive Board is chaired by the Ombudsman and comprises the Deputy Ombudsman, Deputy Chief Executive, and the Director of Communications. The Executive Board manages the Office's functions and activities and is responsible for the delivery of the strategic vision, policies and services to the public and other stakeholders.

### **PSHO's Advisory Board**

In 2004 the Ombudsman appointed a non-statutory Advisory Board to reinforce the governance of the Office.

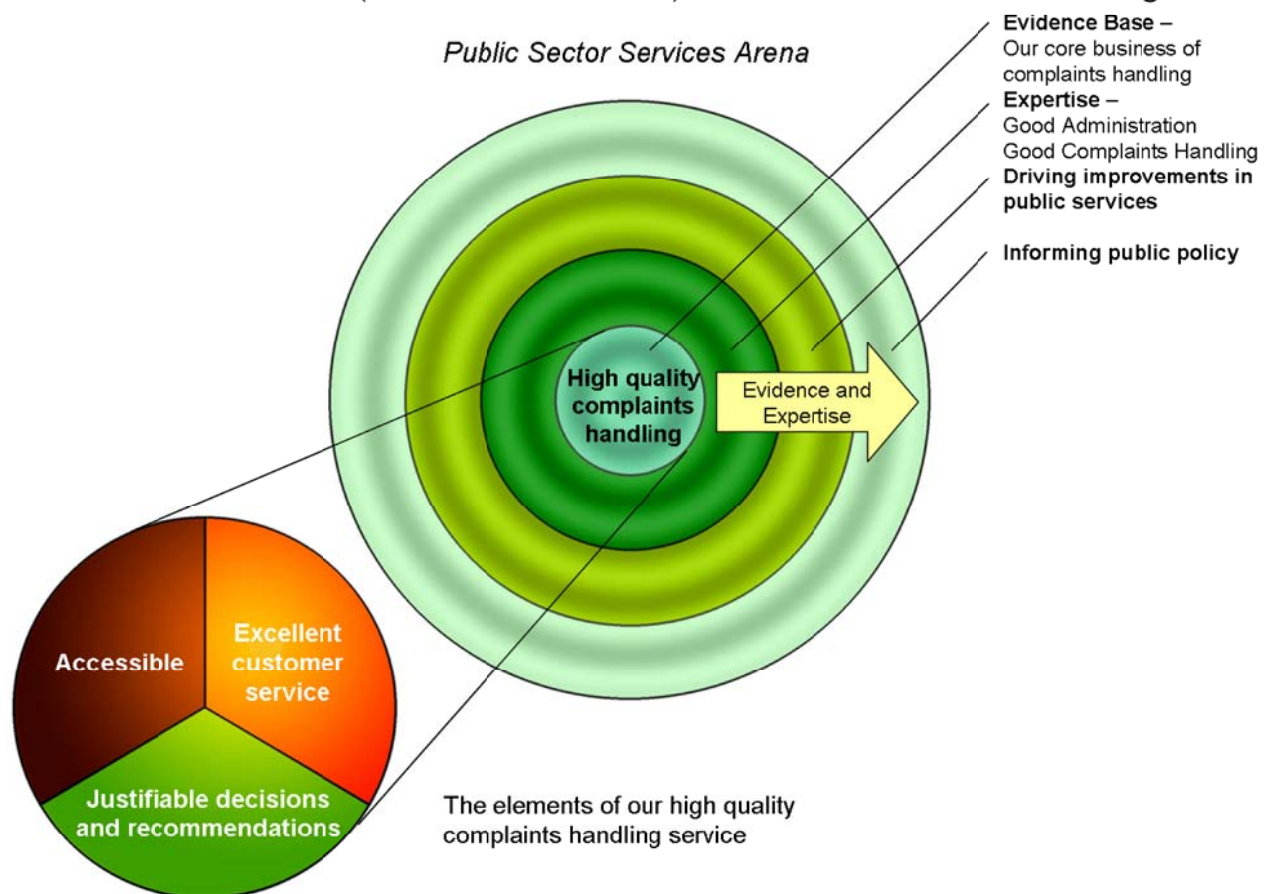
## Aims and Strategic Objectives: 2009 to 2012

The work of the Ombudsman has a dual aspect: individual benefit through our core business to complainants, and others who have suffered as a result of the same maladministration or poor service; and the provision of a wider 'public benefit'.

This wider 'public benefit' stems from the effective use of our evidence base and our expertise in providing a high quality complaint handling service, together with an acknowledged reputation for independence and impartiality. This enables us to provide expertise in good administration and good complaint handling; drive improvements in public service delivery; and inform public policy.

This approach recognises that the purpose of the Ombudsman is not just to provide a retrospective remedy for injustice resulting from maladministration, but also to act with a view to securing prospective improvements in the wider public interest.

We must also recognise that there are various stages of influence in the wider public sector arena, and that it is through a joint focus on our core business and a sound external relations strategy that we will enable our influence to spread. This dual aspect of the work of the Ombudsman (internal and external) is demonstrated in the following model.



The model clearly shows PHSO's two strategic objectives. These are described below, together with a description of the measurable outcomes that we will use to demonstrate success in meeting those objectives.

*Individual benefit*

<b>Strategic Objective 1</b>	<i>To provide an independent, high quality and accessible complaint handling service that rights individual wrongs.</i>			
<b>Outcome</b>	People who need us come to us at the right time for the right reason.	Excellent customer service.	Our decisions are clear, soundly-based and impartial.	Good outcomes for enquirers and complainants are achieved as a result of our interventions and our investigations.

*Public benefit*

<b>Strategic Objective 2</b>	<i>To drive improvements in public services and inform public policy.</i>			
<b>Outcome</b>	We are recognised as the authority on good administration and good complaint handling.	Bodies in jurisdiction apply PHSO's principles in the design and delivery of public services.	Improvements in public services are secured as a result of our reports and recommendations.	Specific policies are informed by our work.

Good management of the business and of our people is a key objective of any organisation and is at the heart of enabling successful delivery of PHSO's strategic objectives. We have summarised this in what we describe as our 'enabling objective', together with the measurable outcomes we will use to demonstrate success in this area.

*Enabling objective*

	<i>To equip our people with the skills, knowledge, systems and resources to deliver our strategic objectives.</i>				
<b>Outcome</b>	We effectively manage our business and our financial resources to secure maximum benefit.	We have a well-led, diverse workforce with the motivation, capability and capacity to deliver high performance.	We are effective in sharing our knowledge and in managing our information.	We have effective and efficient systems and a positive working environment.	We live our values and meet or exceed our corporate statutory responsibilities.

Each year we review our business priorities to ensure that we can make demonstrable progress towards delivering our strategic objectives. These priorities can be found in our published annual Corporate Business Plan and they provide the framework and structure for the activities and deliverables in those Plans. The Plan for 2009-10 is available at: [http://www.ombudsman.org.uk/about\\_us/our\\_plans/index.html](http://www.ombudsman.org.uk/about_us/our_plans/index.html).

## The Ombudsman's Principles

We want to be open and clear, with both complainants and public bodies within the Ombudsman's jurisdiction. For those reasons we have produced the Ombudsman's Principles which include:

- *Principles of Good Administration*
- *Principles of Good Complaint Handling*
- *Principles for Remedy.*

The same six key Principles apply to each of the three documents. These are:

- Getting it right
- Being customer focused
- Being open and accountable
- Acting fairly and proportionately
- Putting things right, and
- Seeking continuous improvement.

The Principles are based on our forty years' experience of handling large numbers of complaints. The Principles endorse legality, flexibility, transparency, fairness and accountability - the necessary ingredients of good administration.

In the three related sets of Principles the value and importance of considering the impact on the individual when offering customer service, thinking about how to deal with complaints and offering remedy are stressed. Of course, it is essential to have proper processes and procedures in place in order to ensure fairness of treatment and for reasons of accountability, but those processes should be focused on outcomes. Public bodies should take into account what is important to the person making the complaint. They should be flexible in considering what the most appropriate response is for that particular individual whilst, of course, bearing in mind correct procedures and proportionality.

The Principles outline the approach we believe public bodies should adopt when delivering good administration and customer service, and how to respond when things go wrong. They underpin our assessment of performance, our vision of good complaint handling and our approach to putting things right.