



# PACAC (Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee)

House of Commons · London SW1A 0AA

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Rob Behrens CBE  
Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman  
By email

18<sup>th</sup> May 2020

Dear Rob,

## **PHSO scrutiny 2018-19 additional questions**

I am grateful to you and Amanda Amroliwala for attending today's Committee meeting scrutinising the work of the PHSO. Time in the evidence session is limited and I have therefore set out some further written questions to which I would be grateful to receive a response.

## **PHSO annual report and accounts 2018-19 and written evidence**

1. Page 34 of your annual report describes the number of days it has taken to close cases. Are these calendar days, or working days? And could this please be clarified in subsequent publications?
2. As explained on page 44, you "invested £353,000 in new ICT capabilities and technical infrastructure". Were there any teething issues with this new ICT provision? And were there any write-offs under this investment?
3. Page 64 of your annual report notes that the Board commissioned an external independent review. What were the main learning points from this review?
4. Page 21 of your annual report describes "maintaining dialogue with....the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee" about your funding requirements. How do you propose to maintain such a dialogue to keep the Committee informed of your funding requirements? Is there anything of which you need to notify us?

5. In your written evidence, you describe the establishment of a new Expert Advisory Panel, which brings support and challenge to improve the organisation. Could you please provide more information on:
  1. How the panel works in practice, and how the panel brings support and challenge to the PHSO;
  2. how long panel members' tenure lasts; and
  3. whether you have plans to change the panel's membership from time to time, to ensure there is always fresh external challenge.
  
6. Why does the PHSO use KPMG as its internal auditors, rather than the Government Internal Audit Agency?

#### **Handling of Mr Nic Hart's complaint**

7. One of the failures identified in the review concerned handovers between caseworkers. The review notes that guidance says that caseworkers must produce written handover notes before leaving the organisation. What are you doing to ensure that this is done? Also, is it best practice within the PHSO for caseworkers to introduce their successor to complainants to help build trust?
  
8. Another failure that was highlighted was about communication with Mr Hart. The Committee often receives submissions from the public concerned about the length of time for which they do not receive answers to their correspondence. Does the PHSO have target times to respond to correspondence, and if not, would you agree to include target times for correspondence in your KPIs, along with your Service Charter?
  
9. Mr Hart described his distress at the misplacing or potential misuse of his personal information and private information about his daughter Averil. Has a full assessment been made of the risk to Mr Hart's personal data of the failure to follow the PHSO's data security procedures?
  
10. Mr Hart explained to us that the PHSO failed to assure him that evidence he submitted was given the proper weight. How do the PHSO's caseworkers seek to assure complainants that their evidence has been given proper weight? (For example, is all evidence the complainant submitted commented on, to actively demonstrate it has been considered?)



11. Please could you set out each failing found by the review, the actions proposed to be taken in response (including those that had already been implemented by the time the review was completed) and target dates for completion for any actions still outstanding.

**Other matters**

12. The Committee has received representations critical of the PHSO's lack of accommodation of complainant's reasonable adjustments. What is the PHSO's policy for complainant's reasonable adjustments? Does the PHSO require complainants to justify their need for reasonable adjustments?
13. In one piece of written evidence, it was suggested to the Committee that the PSHO is not well-equipped to deal with complaints about HS2 ltd. It was put to us that investigations into HS2 require specialist knowledge and a body should be established that can compel HS2 Ltd to "put things right" (rather than simply providing recommendations). What is your response to that?
14. One member of the public, who though not a member of WASPI submitted a complaint to DWP following their advice, has expressed frustration at the ongoing delay in investigating these cases. I note your website states that you cannot provide ongoing commentary as you must investigate in private but are you able to provide any expected timeframe for the six sample complaints to be investigated?

I appreciate there are a number of questions here but I would be grateful nevertheless to receive a response by 5 June.

*Yours ever,*

**William Wragg MP**  
**Chair, Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee**

