

Update to the letter dated 22 Jan 2020, from the Minister for Defence People and Veterans in relation to the Committee's report on the work of the Service Complaints Ombudsman

On 22 January we sent you the attached letter in relation to the Service Complaints Ombudsman. The penultimate paragraph stated:

The Implementation Team are currently considering as a priority the future role of the SCOAF, the powers and length of tenure. We will advise you of developments as soon as we are in a position to do so. I hope this provides you with an update of the work that the Implementation Team are taking forward, and how we will incorporate consideration of those recommendations made in your report.

We are now able to provide you with the following update:

The Implementation Team are currently considering as a priority the future role of the SCOAF, the powers and length of tenure for that post. However, we have not - to date - identified any compelling reasons to increase the length of tenure and, following a meeting with the Ombudsman at the end of January, have started the recruitment process for the next post holder.

Ministry of Defence
12/02/2020



Ministry of Defence

JOHNNY MERCER MP
MINISTER FOR DEFENCE PEOPLE AND VETERANS

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21 January 2020

Dear Chair,

Thank you for your letter of 16 October 2019 in which you thanked the Secretary of State for the Ministry of Defence's response to your Report: *Fairness without Fear: The Work of the Service Complaints Ombudsman*.

In your letter you requested that we keep you informed of the work of the Implementation Team that is taking forward the Service Complaint elements of the Report on Inappropriate Behaviours, including consideration of those recommendations made in your report.

In the early months following the establishment of the Implementation Team, the focus has very much been on engaging with those teams and individuals at the heart of the process. Stakeholder engagement, including with both complainants and respondents through focus groups, will continue into the New Year to ensure we capture and understand the experiences of those who access the system. Work to date has also included the identification and capturing of Management Information and clearly defining the purpose of the Service Complaints system.

We consider this work essential in providing the basis on which to progress with the review and the work that will follow, including: process mapping and system design; development of performance indicators; policy guidance revision; and training provision. The Service Complaints and Justice Transformation Team are currently working to a deadline of April 2020 to develop proposals and agree necessary changes to the Service Complaints system.

With regard to the particular findings and recommendations you highlighted in your letter, we propose to address each of these as follows:

Paragraph 28, An examination of the procedures and current practices of SCOAF and the single Services to see how they can be simplified, speeded up and made more efficient. The results of an assessment of staffing and training requirement for complaint handling within the individual services and the MOD's response to the comprehensive proposal for additional funding and resources that will be submitted by the SCOAF.

Chair
House of Commons Defence Committee
House of Commons
London
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As set out in our response to your report, the work being taken forward by the Implementation Team to review the Service Complaints system will examine the processes and procedures that currently support it. The process mapping work will look at how the process is currently administered by all parties involved, and the subsequent system design work will shape what the new system might look like – work to assess staffing and training requirements will then follow.

Following careful consideration of the SCOAF's submission for additional resources for her office, the MOD has provisionally approved funding for a further five posts.

Paragraphs 48 and 49, Any work undertaken to review and introduce new measures to assess performance in the Service Complaints process. We recommend that these new measures should be present at different levels of the Service Complaints system and should capture and assess the experience of the complainant throughout the process. We would also like to see the results of any work commissioned to streamline the system.

The review of the system we are currently undertaking will consider and identify what measurable elements could constitute a fair, efficient and effective assessment of the system, including how we might capture the experience of both complainants and respondents. We will start to consider this area of work in more detail once we have commenced system design work.

Paragraph 126 – The review of the role of the SCOAF, the powers and length of tenure. We would also like clarification on whether the review looking into the Ombudsman's length of tenure will also consider extending the ombudsman's tenure.

The Implementation Team are currently considering as a priority the future role of the SCOAF, the powers and length of tenure. We will advise you of developments as soon as we are in a position to do so.

I hope this provides you with an update of the work that the Implementation Team are taking forward, and how we will incorporate consideration of those recommendations made in your report.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Mercer', with a stylized flourish at the end.

JOHNNY MERCER MP