

From the Ombudsman Robert Behrens CBE

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



Sent by email

25 January 2021

Dear William,

I am writing about the publication of your Committee's report today following your annual scrutiny of my Office.

I will, of course, respond to the report in full in the usual way. I did, however, want to put on record swiftly my concern and surprise at the drafting of paragraphs 13 and 14 of your report. The drafting of these paragraphs is factually inaccurate in stating that, *'In May 2020, the PHSO reported to the Committee that it had experienced an increase of 13 per cent in demand compared to the previous financial year'*. This is not the case as we have always been clear that this was not data from a full financial year, but in reference to the first 8 months of 2019-20 before our new casework management system was launched.

Following evidence that your Committee received during its annual inquiry, your Office wrote to me asking for clarification about this figure on 12 October, [which I provided on 30 October](#). I also explained the background to this data at our oral evidence session with the Committee.

Despite this repeated clarification, the language contained in this section of your report also goes on to suggest that there may have been a need for me to correct the record and that this was not done. I take my responsibility to be open, transparent, and truthful with Parliament extremely seriously and I am extremely concerned about how this section of the report is drafted.

Although we have been unable to speak before your report was published, my Office has managed to speak to your team of Clerks. They have provided important assurance that the drafting of this section was not meant to imply that the Committee felt that I had misled Parliament in any way. They also confirmed that, should they receive any media queries about the matter, this fact will be made clear. In light of the seriousness of this matter, however, I would be grateful for your own confirmation that this is the case. Should we receive any queries about this ourselves either from the media, or on social media, you will understand that I plan to place this letter on our website pending your reply to make clear the position as confirmed by your team of Clerks.

Yours sincerely,

Rob Behrens

Rob Behrens CBE
Ombudsman and Chair
Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

