



**Public Administration
and Constitutional Affairs
Committee**

From the Chair
Dame Jackie Doyle-Price MP

Rt. Hon. Rishi Sunak
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
Via email only

14 May 2024

Dear Prime Minister,

Appointment of the new Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO)

My predecessor as Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee wrote to you on 12 March, asking you to confirm the appointment panel's recommendation to be the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, which combines the statutory roles of Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and the Health Service Commissioner for England. The letter also asked you to lay out a timetable for the Parliamentary procedures preceding the appointment. The Committee has not received a reply to this letter.

On 19 April an acting Ombudsman, Rebecca Hilsenrath, was appointed to fill the position. However, the *Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1967* section 3A limits her term of office to twelve months from which the vacancy arose. Long-term certainty for the PHSO is crucial given the potential limitations that could be imposed on the work of the PHSO were it to be without an Ombudsman. The last-minute nature of the appointment of the acting Ombudsman is not a precedent to be followed, but a warning to be avoided.

Therefore, I would ask for a definite reply clarifying whether the Government intends to bring forward the motion to the House to appoint the panel's recommended candidate to be the next PHSO.

If the Government rejects the panel's recommended candidate, then the recruitment process will need to be re-run. The process can take up to six months and time for notice also needs to be planned in. To allow sufficient time for this process to take place a decision needs to be taken promptly in order that the new appointment can be in post by 31 March 2025.

Chair, Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee