

Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs
Committee

Appointment of the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

First Report of Session 2024–25

HC 781

Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee

The Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the reports of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and the Health Service Commissioner for England, which are laid before this House, and matters in connection therewith; to consider matters relating to the quality and standards of administration provided by civil service departments, and other matters relating to the civil service; and to consider constitutional affairs.

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[Richard Baker](#) (Labour; Glenrothes and Mid Fife)

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[Michelle Welsh](#) (Labour; Sherwood Forest)

Powers

The committee is a select committee, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 146. These are available on the internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publication

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1 Introduction

The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

1. The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) combines the two statutory roles of Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration (the Parliamentary Ombudsman) and Health Service Commissioner for England (the Health Service Ombudsman), the powers of which are set out in the Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1967 and the Health Service Commissioners Act 1993 respectively.¹
2. The PHSO investigates complaints from individuals that have not been resolved by UK government departments, their non-departmental bodies (NDPBs), bodies such as the Electoral and Boundary Commissions, and the NHS in England.² The PHSO specifically examines complaints of ‘maladministration’, where someone believes there has been an injustice or hardship suffered because the NHS, a UK government department, NDPB or other relevant body has not acted properly or fairly, or has given a poor service and not put things right.
3. The Ombudsman is accountable for all the work of the PHSO, and, crucially, for the decisions made in each case, which can be subject to judicial review. They are responsible for providing leadership and strategic direction to the PHSO; building and maintaining excellent relationships with key stakeholders, including Parliament, Ministers, the NHS in England, other UK and international ombudsmen and the public; and upholding the Venice Principles.³ The Ombudsman is also the PHSO’s Accounting Officer.

1 For the sake of clarity, the office of the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman will be referred to as the PHSO, whereas the post-holder will be referred to as ‘the Ombudsman’.

2 A full list of organisations that fall within the PHSO’s jurisdiction can be found [here](#).

3 The Venice Principles are internationally accepted standards for the proper operation and independence of Public Services Ombudsmen. They set out that the post of Ombudsman requires high moral character, integrity and suitable professional experience and expertise.

4. The PHSO's most recent three-year corporate strategy covered the years 2022–2025.⁴ As there has been no permanent Ombudsman in place since March 2024, with Acting Ombudsman Rebecca Hilsenrath KC (Hon) in the role up until 31 March 2025, the PHSO produced a shorter one-year bridging strategy for 2025–2026.⁵ This strategy set out three strategic objectives:

- Improving access to our service
- Providing an exceptional user experience
- Delivering impact from our casework

It is expected that, once a new permanent Ombudsman is appointed, the PHSO will develop a longer-term strategy.

4 Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, [Corporate Strategy 2022-2025](#)

5 Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, [Our Strategy 2025–2026](#), 23 April 2025

2 Appointing a new Ombudsman

2023–2024 recruitment process

5. The Ombudsman appointment can last a maximum of seven years, and the seven-year term of the previous permanent Ombudsman Sir Robert Behrens came to an end in March 2024 with his retirement.
6. By decision of the House of 18 July 2011, agreement on remuneration between the Prime Minister and the Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) is required before the role of Ombudsman can be advertised.⁶ Consequently, on 25 August 2023, then Chair William Wragg MP wrote to the then Prime Minister with a proposal for the remuneration of the post. He received a reply from the Prime Minister on 27 September 2023. It was agreed that the remuneration would be a salary in the range of £171,500 - £189,900, plus entitlement to a civil service pension (or a choice between that and a judicial pension if applicable); and that the salary should be subject to any relevant increase for Permanent Secretaries and a 1% annual uprating in lieu of performance pay.⁷
7. Following the practice adopted for the appointment of the Ombudsman in both 2011 and 2017, the recruitment process was managed by the House of Commons Service, though in close co-operation with the Government.
8. The post was advertised from 2 October to 6 November 2023 and promoted by GatenbySanderson, the people advisory firm engaged as recruitment consultants to support the recruitment campaign. It was advertised across a range of media, including the House of Commons jobs site and public appointments site. GatenbySanderson sought to maximise the diversity of candidates in terms of protected characteristics and geographical location.
9. Applications were received and considered from 52 candidates. The panel carried out a long-list sift on 16 November and selected 12 candidates for preliminary interview by GatenbySanderson. The panel then carried out a short-list sift on 4 December 2023 and selected six candidates for interview by the panel on 8 January 2024. Two candidates withdrew before interview.

6 HC Deb, 18 July 2011, [col 746](#)

7 Written evidence, House of Commons Administration ([PAO 01](#)), March 2024

10. The four interview candidates underwent a number of assessments before interview. They were also invited to meet, prior to interview, the then Ombudsman and Chief Executive of the PHSO. References were collected for the shortlisted candidates. Candidates were asked to begin their interview with a 5-minute presentation on the challenges facing the PHSO over the next five years. They were then asked a series of questions. On 16 January 2024 the panel wrote to the then Prime Minister, reporting its findings and inviting him to agree to the appointment of its recommended candidate, subject to the agreement of the House of Commons.
11. On 12 March 2024, the then Chair of PACAC wrote to the Prime Minister, asking him to confirm the panel's recommended candidate for Ombudsman.⁸ No reply was received. However, on 25 March 2024 the Government tabled a humble Address for consideration asking His Majesty to appoint the then Chief Executive Rebecca Hilsenrath as acting Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and acting Health Service Commissioner for England. The House agreed to the motion.⁹ On 19 April 2024 the PHSO announced that Rebecca Hilsenrath had been appointed to fill the position.¹⁰ Section 3A of the Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1967 limited her term of office to twelve months from the time the vacancy arose, which means she ceased to be the Acting Ombudsman on 31 March 2025.¹¹ We would like to take this opportunity to thank both Sir Rob Behrens for his service, and Rebecca Hilsenrath for taking up the role of Acting Ombudsman and leading the PHSO over the course of the last year.
12. Seeking clarity on the appointment of a permanent Ombudsman, the then Chair of PACAC, then Dame Jackie Doyle-Price MP, wrote to the then Prime Minister asking for clarification as to whether the Government intended to bring forward a motion to the House of Commons to appoint the panel's recommended candidate to be the next Ombudsman.¹² No answer was received before the General Election of 2024.

Recruitment process in 2024–25

13. Following the General Election, on 28 October 2024 the Prime Minister wrote to the Clerk of the House of Commons, Tom Goldsmith, saying that he thought it right to relaunch the recruitment process to allow a permanent

8 Letter from the then Chair to the then Prime Minister regarding the Appointment of the new Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, [14 May 2024](#)

9 HC Deb, 25 March 2024, [col 1356](#)

10 Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman press release, [Rebecca Hilsenrath becomes interim Ombudsman](#), 19 April 2024

11 [Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1967](#), section 3A, clause (2)(a)

12 Letter from the then Chair to the then Prime Minister regarding the Appointment of the new Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, [14 May 2024](#)

Ombudsman to be appointed before the end of March 2025. This was accepted by the Clerk of the House when replying to the Prime Minister on 8 November 2024.

14. Following the requirements of the 2011 Resolution of the House of Commons, on 12 November 2024 the Chair of PACAC Simon Hoare MP wrote to the Prime Minister proposing that the salary offered should be the same as that agreed by the former Prime Minister and former Chair during the previous recruitment round.¹³ The exchange of letters between the Prime Minister and the Chair on remuneration is appended to this report as Appendix 2. The response was received on 19 December 2024 with the advertisement for the role published on 3 January 2025. The application process closed at noon on 10 February 2025. A full description of the selection process as provided by the House of Commons Administration is appended to this report as Appendix 3, and the full job and person specification are appended as Appendix 4. The appointment panel sent its recommendation for the next Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman to the Prime Minister on 13 March 2025.

The candidate

15. The Prime Minister, Rt Hon Sir Keir Starmer MP, wrote to the Chair of PACAC on 28 March 2025, accepting the Panel's recommendation that Paula Sussex CBE be appointed as Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman. The letter is appended as Appendix 1.
16. Paula Sussex has worked across the public, private and voluntary sectors, leading organisations such as the Charity Commission and Student Loans Company, and, most recently, fintech startup OneID as Chief Executive. Previously, she worked in consultancy, with her career taking her to PwC, TXU (Eastern Group), KPMG Consulting and Atos, as well as the service delivery of large scale IT, assuming the role of Senior Vice President at CGI (Logica). Ms Sussex was made a CBE in the 2023 New Year's Honours List for 'services to higher education'.¹⁴ Ms Sussex's CV is appended as Appendix 5.

13 HC Deb, 18 July 2011, [col 746](#)

14 Cabinet Office, [New Year's Honours List 2023: Cabinet Office](#), 30 December 2022

The pre-appointment hearing

17. The pre-appointment hearing with Paula Sussex was conducted on 23 April 2025.
18. We questioned Ms Sussex on how transferable her previous experience as Chief Executive at the Charity Commission, Student Loans Company, and fintech startup OneID, is to the Ombudsman post, especially given the proportion of the PHSO's caseload that is specifically health-related, and the importance of the Ombudsman being equipped to constructively and compassionately engage with service users, many of whom have been through very difficult experiences. We touched on the fact the PHSO has developed a one-year bridging strategy for 2025–26, and asked what she thought the PHSO should prioritise and focus on over the next three years. Given the recent uncertainty at the top of the organisation and the industrial action undertaken by PHSO staff in February, we also explored how she would go about increasing stability and improving staff confidence and satisfaction, particularly in an uncertain economic climate. This will include ensuring she is visible to the organisation across both office locations in Manchester and London. Finally, in recognition of the efforts in recent years to reform the Ombudsman, for example, through removing the 'MP filter' and merging certain Ombudsmen, we questioned her on how far Ombudsman reform would be a priority for her upon taking up the role.

CONCLUSION

19. We are satisfied that Paula Sussex has the personal independence and professional skills necessary to fulfil the high profile, demanding and varied role of Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman. Paula Sussex is an excellent candidate with a track record of organisational transformation with a focus on improving the effectiveness and external reputations of the organisations she has led. Her professional background and experience as Chief Executive will aid her in giving the PHSO direction and certainty. We wish her every success in this role.

Appendix 1: Letter from the Prime Minister to Simon Hoare MP, 28 March 2025

Dear Simon,

I am grateful to you, and to your colleagues on the Selection Panel, for your work in running a campaign to identify a new Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman at such pace. I am pleased to accept the Panel's recommendation that Paula Sussex should be appointed to this post and will arrange for a suitable motion to be tabled inviting the House to approve the appointment.

I understand that your committee will undertake a pre-appointment hearing with the recommended candidate, so I hope this can be taken forward as soon as possible, so that the motion can be put to the House.

I am copying this letter to the Speaker, the Secretary of State for Health, the Leader of the House of Commons, and Sir Chris Wormald.

All best wishes,

Keir Starmer

Appendix 2: Exchange of letters between the Prime Minister and Simon Hoare MP on remuneration, 12 November 2024 and 19 December 2024

Dear Prime Minister,

As you know, the House of Commons have to re-run the recruitment process for a new Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman.

By the decision of the House of 18 July 2011, the level of remuneration must be agreed between the Prime Minister and the Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee before the post can be advertised.

I wish to propose that the salary to be offered to the preferred candidate should be the same as that agreed last year between our predecessors. This was a salary in the range of £171,500 - £189,900, plus entitlement to a civil service pension (or a choice between that and a judicial pension if applicable). I attach the relevant exchange of letters.

It would be for the House of Commons Administration to decide the exact amount of the starting salary, taking into account the experience of the candidate and the views of the recruitment panel. The expectation would be that the top of the range would be offered only to exceptional candidates.

May I ask that you agree to this proposal? An early response would be much appreciated to enable us to make progress with this appointment.

I am copying this letter to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

Yours ever,

Simon

Simon Hoare MP

Chair, Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee

Dear Simon,

Thank you for your letter of 8 November 2024, regarding launching a new campaign for the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO). This is an important role, and I too am keen to ensure that the upcoming campaign strikes a balance between progressing at pace and attracting a strong field of potential candidates.

I understand the underpinning legislation requires my approval of the remuneration of the role, therefore I can confirm that I am content, following approvals from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, that the preferred candidate is offered a salary in the range of £171,500 - £189,900, plus entitlement to a civil service pension (or a choice between that and a judicial pension if applicable). This would reflect the remuneration of 'Tier 2' Permanent Secretaries to which the remuneration for the PHSO role has historically been aligned.

As your letter has requested, I can assure you that the Government will work to ensure that decisions are turned around as swiftly as possible, and that if it is not possible to conclude the appointment by 31 March, we will work with you to ensure the role is not left vacant for longer than necessary. The Chancellor for the Duchy of Lancaster is overseeing this campaign and I understand that the House is already working closely with Cabinet Office officials. I am grateful for the House's continued collaboration as the campaign progresses.

I am copying this letter to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury.

All best wishes,

Keir Starmer

Appendix 3: Selection process information

Recruitment of new Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman: Memorandum from the House of Commons Administration to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee

Purpose

1. Prior to the Committee's expected pre-appointment hearing and subsequent debate in the House of Commons on a motion to appoint the new Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, this note is to inform the Committee about the recruitment process.
2. The Committee may wish to publish this memorandum, in order to inform debate in the House.

Background

3. The post of the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) combines the two statutory roles of Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and the Health Service Commissioner for England, whose powers are set out in the Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1967 and in the Health Service Commissioners Act 1993 respectively.
4. The purpose of the role is to provide an independent complaint handling service. The PHSO makes final decisions on complaints that government departments, a range of other public bodies in the UK and the NHS in England have not acted properly or fairly or have provided a poor service. The findings from the PHSO's casework are shared with Parliament to help its scrutiny of public service providers and more widely to help drive improvements in public services.
5. The 1967 Act provides that the PHSO is appointed by His Majesty The King by Letters Patent for a period not exceeding seven years.

The 2024 recruitment process

6. A recruitment for the PHSO role was advertised in October 2023 and concluded with a recommendation to the then Prime Minister in January 2024, to which no formal response was received. Further detail about the previous recruitment exercise was given in the memorandum to the previous PACAC from the chair of that recruitment panel, Philippa Helme CB, a former House of Commons Principal Clerk. The Committee published it at committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/128917/html/. As set out in that memorandum, it was proposed that, because it was likely that there would be a gap between the end of Rob Behrens' term of office on 31 March 2024 and the appointment of a successor, the Chief Executive of the PHSO, Rebecca Hilsenrath KC (Hon), should be appointed as Acting Ombudsman.
7. Section 3A(1) of the 1967 Act and paragraph 2 of Schedule 1 to the 1993 Act provide that, if the office is vacant, His Majesty may appoint, pending the appointment of a new Commissioner, an acting Commissioner, who may serve for up to twelve months beginning with the date on which the vacancy arose.
8. The current Acting PHSO, Rebecca Hilsenrath KC(Hon), was appointed following a debate in the House on 25 March 2024. Her term of office expired on 31 March 2025, the anniversary of Rob Behrens' departure.
9. The present Prime Minister wrote to the Clerk of the House on 28 October 2024 saying that given how much time had passed, during which a new Parliament had been formed, he believed it was right to begin again and relaunch a recruitment process for a permanent Ombudsman.

The 2025 recruitment process

10. Following the practice adopted in the previous three recruitment exercises, the recruitment of the next PHSO has been managed by the House of Commons Service, though in close co-operation with the Government. This arrangement is acknowledged in the [Cabinet Manual](#) (paragraph 5.40):
11. "The Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration, known as the Parliamentary Ombudsman, is an officer of the House of Commons appointed by the Crown and is independent of the Government. In recognition of the Ombudsman's relationship with Parliament, the House now leads on the recruitment to the role."
12. On 12 November 2024 the Clerk of the House, Tom Goldsmith, selected me to be the recruitment lead. I am a former Principal Clerk in the House of Commons, and have served as Clerk of Legislation, Clerk of the Journals, and Acting Clerk Assistant.

Recruitment panel

- 13.** A panel was appointed to oversee the recruitment process and to recommend a candidate for appointment. In line with previous practice, the panel included the Chair of PACAC, a Government Permanent Secretary, as well as an experienced Ombudsman and an independent panellist. The members of the panel were:
- Liam Laurence Smyth (chair)
 - Colleen Harris (independent panellist)
 - Simon Hoare MP (Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee)
 - Clara Swinson (Second Permanent Secretary Head of Mission Delivery Unit, Cabinet Office)
 - Peter Tyndall (formerly President of the International Ombudsman Institute)

Christopher Stanton, Principal Clerk in the Select Committee Team, and Elektra Garvie-Adams, Senior Clerk, were the secretariat to the panel and have supported me in managing the recruitment process.

- 14.** As with the previous exercise in 2023–24, we engaged GatenbySanderson as recruitment consultants to assist in finding suitable candidates.
- 15.** The panel met on 27 November 2024 and agreed the following:
- The advertisement, search, assessment and interview processes.
 - The person specification, job criteria and candidate pack.

Agreement on remuneration, and advertisement of the post

- 16.** By decision of the House of 18 July 2011, agreement on remuneration between the Prime Minister and the Chair of PACAC is required before the role can be advertised.
- 17.** The Chair of PACAC wrote to the Prime Minister on 12 November 2024 with a proposal for the remuneration of the post. He received a reply from the Prime Minister on 19 December. It was agreed that the remuneration would be a salary in the range of £171,500 - £189,900, plus entitlement to a civil service pension (or a choice between that and a judicial pension if applicable). This would reflect the remuneration of ‘Tier 2’ Permanent Secretaries to which the remuneration for the PHSO role has historically been aligned.

18. I would ask the Committee to report the correspondence on remuneration to the House in compliance with the House's Resolution of 18 July 2011:

Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and Health Service
Commissioner for England (Remuneration)

Resolved, Motion made and Question put forthwith, That, in the opinion of this House, the salary paid to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and Health Service Commissioner for England should be £152,000 a year, a sum within the range of salaries payable to Permanent Secretaries in the civil service as required by section 2(2) of the Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1967, as amended by the Parliamentary and other Pensions and Salaries Act 1976; and that this should be subject to (a) any relevant increase for Permanent Secretaries recommended by the Senior Salaries Review Body and (b) after the end of the current pay freeze, 1 per cent. annual uprating in lieu of performance pay; and considers that in future, and subject always to statutory requirements, the remuneration of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and Health Service Commissioner for England should be agreed by the Prime Minister and the Chair of the Public Administration Select Committee in advance of the recruitment process, and reported to the House, prior to the House being invited to agree to an humble Address on such an appointment. –(Mr Nick Hurd)

Recruitment campaign, sifting and interview

19. The post was advertised from 3 January to 10 February 2025. As well as being actively promoted by GatenbySanderson, the post was advertised on a range of media, including the House of Commons and Civil Service jobs sites.
20. We particularly tasked GatenbySanderson with maximising the diversity of the field and we were assured throughout that every effort had been made to deliver on this front. Our requirement extended beyond the protected characteristics, with emphasis on securing talent from outside London. Securing 114 applications overall, 42% of the overall field was female, 40% was ethnically diverse and 15% declared a disability. Three protected characteristics featured in the final shortlist. Notably, three of the six interviewed candidates were female, and three of the six were educated in the state school system.
21. The panel carried out a sift on 24 February and selected six candidates for interview by the panel on 10 and 11 March 2025.

- 22. The interviewed candidates were asked to undergo assessments before interview including a media test, a leadership profiling assessment based on a self-assessment and a behavioural interview with a psychologist. Candidates were also offered the opportunity to meet, prior to interview, with the senior independent non-executive director on the board of PHSO.
- 23. References for the shortlisted candidates were collected prior to the interviews. Due diligence tests were conducted, including a search of social media.
- 24. The candidates were asked a series of questions by the panel designed to test their suitability for the role and were assessed against the published criteria.

Recommendation to the Prime Minister and subsequent stages

- 25. Following interviews, I as panel chair wrote to the Prime Minister on 13 March 2025, reporting its conclusions. The Prime Minister informed the Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee that he accepted the Panel's recommendation that Paula Sussex should be appointed and that he would arrange for a suitable motion to be tabled inviting the House to approve the appointment.
- 26. The Prime Minister noted that it is expected that the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee will wish to hold a pre-appointment hearing prior to the debate and decision in the House. Subject to the approval of the House, a Humble Address will be presented to His Majesty The King asking him to make the appointment to the offices of Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and Health Service Commissioner for England.
- 27. The Government and the PHSO will be making arrangements to mitigate the effects of the gap between the end of the Acting Commissioner's term of office on 31 March 2025 and new Ombudsman taking up their post.

Liam Laurence Smyth CB

Recruitment Lead and Chair, Recruitment Panel

1 April 2025

Appendix 4: Person

Specification for the post

Purpose of the role

The post of Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (the Ombudsman) combines the two statutory roles of Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and the Health Service Commissioner for England, whose powers are set out in the Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1967 and in the Health Service Commissioners Act 1993 respectively. The Ombudsman is independent and impartial. The postholder is not part of Government or the NHS in England. They are not a regulator, a consumer champion or an advocacy service.

The purpose of the role is to provide an independent complaint handling service. The Ombudsman makes final decisions on complaints that government departments, a range of other public bodies in the UK, and the NHS in England have not acted properly or fairly or have provided a poor service. The findings from the Ombudsman's casework are shared with Parliament to help them scrutinise public service providers and shared more widely to help drive improvements in public services.

The Ombudsman is supported in their work by approximately 550 employees, known as the office of the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO).

About the role

The Ombudsman is responsible for:

- Fulfilling the statutory responsibilities of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and the Health Service Commissioner for England
- Providing the leadership and strategic direction to PHSO
- Building and maintaining excellent relationships with key stakeholders, including Parliament, Ministers, central Government, the NHS in England, other UK and international ombudsmen and the public

- Acting as Accounting Officer for PHSO under arrangements agreed with HM Treasury
- Upholding the Venice Principles.

The Ombudsman works closely with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and is an ex-officio member of the Commission for Local Administration in England.

Accountability

The Ombudsman has statutory responsibilities and powers to report directly to Parliament. The House of Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (known as PACAC) is the principal liaison mechanism with the Ombudsman.

Each year, the Ombudsman lays an Annual Report and Accounts before Parliament so that PHSO's performance can be scrutinised and challenged. The Ombudsman appears before PACAC alongside the Chief Executive to give evidence on the work of PHSO, usually following the publication of the Annual Report and Accounts.

The Ombudsman regularly reports to Parliament or publishes reports on individual and/or systemic examples of injustice and hardship caused by maladministration. In recent years, this has included reports on a range of issues, from the impact of the Windrush compensation scheme, to issues with Employment and Support Allowance and State Pension age communications, to major reports on patient safety such as 'Broken trust: making patient safety more than just a promise'. These reports have helped PACAC in its scrutiny of public services and are an increasingly important part of PHSO's role.

The Ombudsman is solely responsible and accountable for the conduct and administration of all work carried out by PHSO and for the decisions made in each case. Decisions of the Ombudsman may be judicially reviewed by application to the courts. The Ombudsman may delegate authority to PHSO staff to act on their behalf.

As the permanent head of PHSO, the Ombudsman is its Accounting Officer under arrangements agreed with HM Treasury. As Accounting Officer the Ombudsman has responsibility for ensuring the regularity and propriety of PHSO's activities and resources used, and for effective financial and internal control systems. PHSO's Annual Report and Accounts are audited by the National Audit Office.

Governance

The Ombudsman is responsible for the sound governance and effective internal control of the Ombudsman service. The governance arrangements put in place by the present Acting Ombudsman to support her in the leadership, governance and management of the office are set out in the [2023–24 Annual Report and Accounts](#). They include a non-statutory unitary Board chaired by the Acting Ombudsman with eight non-executive Board members and two executive Board members. There is also an Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, a Remuneration and Nominations Committee, and a Strategic Delivery Committee.

A Public Engagement Advisory Group of former complainants and members of the public was formed in 2023 to drive improvements, inform strategic decision making and help PHSO create a user focused service, with group members drawing on their lived experience to strengthen the organisation's work.

Further information is available on the [PHSO website](#).

Resources and funding

PHSO currently has around 550 employees operating from two sites: a main office with around 500 staff in the centre of Manchester, and a smaller office of around 50 staff in London (Millbank Tower, Westminster). The Millbank lease is coming to an end in September 2025 and alternative premises are being identified elsewhere in London.

PHSO's Parliamentary funding settlement for 2024–25 is £43.3m.

PHSO makes final decisions on complaints that have not been resolved by UK Government departments, the NHS in England and some other UK public organisations. In 2023–24, the Ombudsman accepted 29,306 complaints for consideration. The majority of these were about the NHS in England.

Vision and strategy

PHSO's vision is: a voice for improvement in public services through the provision of an independent, impartial and fair complaints handling service, as an internationally respected public services Ombudsman.

PHSO has three strategic objectives:

1. People who use public services have a better awareness of the role of the Ombudsman and can easily access our service.
2. People we work with receive a high quality, empathetic and timely service, according to international Ombudsman principles.

3. We contribute to a culture of learning and continuous improvement, leading to high standards in public service.

These form part of PHSO's [strategy 2022 to 2025](#).

Values

PHSO's values were developed in close consultation with staff and stakeholders. They are:

Independence – from organisations we investigate, holding them to account for service failure.

Fairness – listening carefully to complainants and the organisations we investigate and making impartial and fair decisions based on relevant evidence.

Excellence – learning from engagement with complainants and organisations investigated to improve accessibility, efficiency and effectiveness, as well as the quality of our decisions.

Transparency – communicating with those who use our service and publishing information about our findings, how we are performing, and how organisations we investigate have implemented our recommendations.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

Equality, diversity and inclusion are fundamental to the way PHSO works. Creating and maintaining an equal, diverse and inclusive Ombudsman service is vital for individuals who work for PHSO, for people who bring their complaints to PHSO and for those investigated.

PHSO is committed to maintaining a culture where its employees can be themselves at work and perform at their best, and also that they represent and understand the diverse community we serve.

PHSO is a Disability Confident organisation, making sure that disabled people and people with long term health conditions have the opportunities to fulfil their potential in the workplace.

PHSO knows that large sections of our communities do not bring complaints, despite suffering failings and injustices when using public services. As part of its 2022–2025 corporate strategy, PHSO is developing its knowledge and understanding of why there are individuals who are unable to or reluctant to bring a complaint, and, where people do bring complaints, making sure that its service is adaptable to meet their needs.

Acting Ombudsman

Rebecca Hilsenrath was appointed Acting Ombudsman on 18 April 2024. Her term ends on 31 March 2025. She joined the organisation in 2021 and is the substantive Chief Executive Officer of PHSO, a role she took up in July 2023.

Person specification

This is a demanding, sensitive and high-profile role which requires an excellent leader who can demonstrate that they can operate in complex environments and maximise impact with a wide range of stakeholders.

Strategic vision, excellent judgement and authority are paramount as the organisation continues to manage increasing demand for its service, while also planning for the future in an uncertain economic climate.

The postholder will have a successful track record and experience of operating with independence and impartiality.

No specific professional background is required but the postholder will need to bring the experience and skills that will inspire confidence in their ability to lead and develop the Ombudsman service in the face of increasing demand and limited resources.

The role will require someone with a good understanding and some experience of:

- the role of the Ombudsman service and its position in relation to Parliament, Government and the courts;
- the working of central Government, the wider public sector and the NHS;
- the expectations of public service users and the issues faced by underrepresented groups;
- principles of administrative justice and public law; and
- the Venice Principles.

The [Venice Principles](#) state that the post requires high moral character, integrity and appropriate professional expertise and experience.

The postholder will also need to demonstrate understanding of, and an exemplary commitment to, the [Seven Principles of Public Life](#).

Candidates should provide evidence in their application of how they meet all the essential criteria set out in the bullet points below:

Leadership

- A successful track record of strategic leadership in an organisation of significant scale, delivering change and achieving personal impact externally and internally.
- Ability to deal with the pressures of individual responsibility and high-profile decision making.

Judgement and intellect

- Excellent judgement with proven ability to act and make difficult decisions independently and impartially.
- Strong analytical skills with the ability to think critically and flexibly, and to identify, evaluate and manage risk.

Relationships and integrity

- A track record in building and maintaining high-level partnerships, both internally and externally, and the ability to develop productive relations with international peers.
- Evident integrity and the ability to command public confidence and the respect of staff, service users, Parliament, central Government and the NHS in England.

Communications and impact

- Authoritative public speaker, with an understanding of how to influence improvements in public services.
- Strong influencing skills and the ability to maximise impact both internally and across Government and the NHS.

Finance and governance

- Experience in delivering value for money and achieving operational excellence, while operating within budgetary constraints.
- Ability to maintain good governance and administration, including ensuring appropriate organisational structures and controls are in place.

Knowledge

- Understanding of the role of the Ombudsman and of the working of Parliament, Government, the NHS and the wider public sector.

Terms and conditions

Appointment

This appointment will be subject to the requirements of the Parliamentary Commissioner Act 1967 and the Health Service Commissioners Act 1993.

The Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration and the Health Service Commissioner for England are formally appointed by Letters Patent by His Majesty the King. Both appointments have always been held by the same person.

To reflect the Parliamentary nature of the post and its independence from Government, the recruitment process is being led by the House of Commons, in collaboration with the Cabinet Office and the Department of Health and Social Care and in consultation with PHSO.

The recruitment panel will include the Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC), a Permanent Secretary, a person with experience of the role of an ombudsman, and an independent external member. The Prime Minister will table a motion for the House of Commons to approve the nominated person before His Majesty the King makes the formal appointment by letters patent.

The Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee is expected to hold a public preappointment hearing before the House of Commons is asked to approve the appointment.

Term of office

You will be appointed by the King for a non-renewable fixed term of no longer than seven years. We expect the appointment to be for five years, with the possibility of extension to seven, subject to discussion with the successful candidate.

The appointment is expected to commence on 1 April 2025 or as soon as possible after issue of Letters Patent.

If legislation were enacted to dissolve, restructure or wind up the PHSO during the period of your appointment, your appointment would cease with effect from that dissolution or such other date as is specified in the legislation. You would not be eligible for compensation for that termination.

Hours of work / flexible working

This is a full-time position.

It will be a busy and complex role, but there is scope for some flexibility in working arrangements. Candidates should inform the recruitment panel of any proposals for flexible working no later than the preliminary interview.

Location

The postholder may be based at either the London or Manchester office, and will be expected to visit each of these regularly and give visible leadership. There will be scope for some working from home.

Remuneration and pension

The remuneration will be in the range of £171,500-£189,900 per annum plus entitlement to a civil service pension (or a choice between that and a judicial pension if applicable).

Security vetting

Before taking up the appointment the candidate will be subject to security vetting (Counter Terrorist Check).

Nationality

Applicants must be able to prove they are eligible to work in the UK.

Exclusions

Holders of certain offices, including members of health service bodies and family health service providers which are within the Ombudsman's jurisdiction, cannot be appointed as Ombudsman, under the terms of the Health Service Commissioners Act 1993. Candidates will be asked to confirm that they comply with this requirement.

Impartiality and interests

Applicants for this role will need to demonstrate their impartiality, both in terms of political activities and/or membership of or connections with any organisations that might compromise, or be seen to compromise, their ability to act impartially, objectively and independently.

Past political activity is not a bar, and we welcome applicants who can demonstrate political awareness. However, in the interests of transparency, applicants are asked to disclose current or previous political activity that might give rise to questions about your impartiality.

You are also asked to provide details of any offices you hold and of business or other interests or any personal connections which, if you are appointed, could be misconstrued or cause embarrassment. These will not prevent you

going forward to interview but may, if appropriate, be explored with you during your interview to establish how you would address the issue(s) should you be successful in your application.

How to apply

The recruitment panel has appointed GatenbySanderson, an executive search agency, to advise on this appointment.

If you wish to apply for this post, please visit:

<https://www.gatenbysanderson.com/job/GSe117762/>

Please ensure that you provide the following:

A **comprehensive CV** (no more than two sides of A4).

A **supporting statement** (maximum two sides of A4), , outlining how you meet the essential criteria in the person specification. Please note that the Supporting Statement is an important part of your application and is as much the means by which you will be assessed as your CV.

Please also complete the **Statutory Exclusions form**, the **Political Activity form**, and the **Financial or other conflicts of interest form**.

As part of the online application process, you will be asked to complete an equal opportunities monitoring page. The information on this page will be treated as confidential, and used for statistical purposes only. This information will not be treated as part of your application.

The closing date for applications is 12 noon, Monday 10 February 2025.

Overview of the recruitment process

Once submitted, GatenbySanderson will acknowledge your application.

Your application will be assessed on the basis of your evidence for the post against the essential criteria in the person specification on pages 6 and 7. Please ensure that you provide written evidence in your supporting statement to demonstrate how you meet the criteria.

At shortlisting, the recruitment panel will determine which candidates will be invited for final interview, taking account of the evidence provided by candidates in their CVs and the supporting statements. You will be advised of the outcome of your application by GatenbySanderson.

It is likely that final interviews with the appointment panel will take place face-to-face, in London.

GatenbySanderson will take two references in advance of the final interview.

Candidates selected for final interview may be asked to complete one or more assessments, the results of which will be shared with the recruitment panel.

The final panel interviews are likely to be held in the week commencing Monday 3 March 2025. You will be advised of the format in advance.

The panel's recommendation will be submitted to the Prime Minister who will table a motion in the House of Commons proposing the name of the individual to be appointed. PACAC is expected to hold a pre-appointment hearing with the nominee prior to the debate.

The appointment is formally made by His Majesty on an Address from the House of Commons.

Diversity and equality in the recruitment process

The panel is committed to attracting a diverse field of candidates for this important role, including and beyond the protected characteristics.

The panel is operating a guaranteed interview scheme for candidates with a disability. We will offer an interview to all applicants who declare a disability and who provide evidence of meeting the essential criteria for the post.

To be eligible, your disability must be within the definition laid down in the Equality Act 2010. A disabled person is defined by the Equality Act 2010 as someone who has a physical or mental impairment, which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to perform normal day-to-day activities. For the purposes of this policy, these words have the following meanings:

- 'substantial' means more than minor or trivial
- 'long-term' means that the effect of the impairment has lasted, or is likely to last, 12 months (there are special rules covering recurring or fluctuating conditions)
- 'Normal day-to-day activities' include everyday things like eating, washing, walking and going shopping.

If you consider yourself eligible to apply for this post under the guaranteed interview scheme, please note this on the relevant form in your application, where you can also say whether you will require any reasonable adjustments to the recruitment process.

Recruitment panel

The members of the recruitment panel are:

- Liam Laurence Smyth (chair)
- Colleen Harris (independent panellist)
- Simon Hoare MP (Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee)
- Clara Swinson (Second Permanent Secretary Head of Mission Delivery Unit, Cabinet Office)
- Peter Tyndall (formerly President of the International Ombudsman Institute)

Indicative timeline

The expected timetable is as follows:

Closing Date	12:00 noon, Monday 10 February 2025
Shortlisting meeting	w/c 17 February 2025
Any assessments and opportunity for shortlisted candidates to learn more about the role	w/c 17 and 24 February
References	From 17 February 2025
First Panel interviews	w/c 3 March 2025
Pre-appointment hearing by PACAC	Following consideration of panel recommendation by the Prime Minister
Motion in the House of Commons	Following consideration of panel recommendation by the Prime Minister
Appointment by Letters Patent	Following approval of motion by the House of Commons
Appointment to commence	1 April 2025 or as soon as possible after issue of Letters Patent

Please note that these dates could be subject to change. If you are unable to meet this timeframe, please let us know in your application letter.

Data Protection

The House of Commons will use your data in line with our [Privacy Notice for the Public](#).

Appendix 5: Candidate CV

Paula SUSSEX CBE

A chief executive with a strong track record of transformation in both the private and public sectors, regularly described as leading with energy, drive and passion. I am an inclusive leader, enabling capability in both individuals and organisation.

I am digitally fluent and bring a strong commercial mindset to all roles.

OneID 2023 to current date CEO

OneID is a Bcorp fintech start up that provides bank-based digital ID for 50 million UK citizens who bank online. It is backed by angel investors and is regulated by the FCA. As CEO my role is to grow the business and to develop the market, ensure that the product maintains its competitiveness, and ensure compliant and smooth service delivery.

Student Loans Company 2018 to 2022 CEO

SLC is a government-owned company that finances approximately two million new and returning students in colleges and universities in the UK each year. Last year, SLC paid over £21 billion in maintenance loans and tuition fee loans (on behalf of students) to universities and colleges. Overall, SLC now serves 8.5 million customers and manages a loan book worth over £200bn, with growing numbers of customers, loan book value and finance product variants. Described by McKinsey in 2016 as “a medium-sized retail bank”, SLC aligns to Financial Conduct Authority regulatory principles.

As CEO, I was responsible for the overall performance of SLC, an organisation of 3,300 and a budget of £270m. This included the implementation of a comprehensive technology and workforce transformation, including the introduction of modern technologies in a highly complex legacy estate which radically increased resilience and enabled our customers to self-serve; comprehensive engagement and workforce strategies that increased the engagement score by 11%; stabilised the organisation’s reputation following a difficult few years in the press. During Covid, we successfully managed an 8% increase in application demand without any interruption to customer service. Cost per customer also reduced by 10%.

Charity Commission for England and Wales 2014–2017 CEO

The Charity Commission is the registrar and regulator for some 160,000 charities and 850,000 trustees, with a headcount of 300 and a budget of £25m. As CEO and Accounting Officer, I was accountable for ensuring that charities were compliant, with a regulatory focus on counter-terrorism, financial mismanagement and safeguarding.

Following a highly critical NAO report in 2013 that concluded the Commission was “*not regulating charities effectively*”, I designed and implemented a new operating model and executed a transformation programme which included automation of basic regulatory processes; a new online registration service, reducing time to register and increased proactive regulation. This resulted in the NAO concluding in 2017 that “*The Commission has improved significantly since our initial 2013 report. It has made improvements through the transformation programme, embedding a culture of continuous improvement and the use of a more risk-based approach*”.

During this period, I also oversaw the successful passage of legislation through parliament implementing a new set of regulatory powers and through close focus, improved the external reputation of the organisation.

CGI (Logica) 2012–2014

Senior Vice President, Public Sector

End to end responsibility (strategy, sales, delivery, p&l) for a £400m business of 2,000 staff delivering IT solutions and outsourcing to the public sector. Delivered to business plan targets as the Logica business was integrated into CGI, the acquirer. Achieved significant and sustainable growth in the public sector business through the creation of new products, such as next generation cloud technologies, and new markets such as health and CGI’s outsourcing business in Scotland. Achieved £210m of a £250m new business target in 2014. Member of main board of CGI UK.

Atos 2003–2012

Senior Vice President CEO, Atos

Consulting

Overall responsibility (strategy, sales, delivery, p&l) of this £50m consulting to the private and public sectors and secured its turnaround (taking its headcount from 500 to 300 in the process) and return to profit during the 2008 global recession. Developed new consulting offerings in IT strategy and operational efficiency. Winner of several Management Consultancies Association awards. Member of main board of Atos UK.

Account Director, Public Sector

Responsible for sales and delivery in a range of accounts, which was instrumental to the growth and consolidation of Atos's position in the public sector market. Sales included Ministry of Justice outsource (£500m TCV); subsequent delivery of a complex transition from four legacy contracts to 30,000 users to some 800 courts and tribunals in an annual turnover of £100m, delivered by 100 technology professionals.

KPMG Consulting 1999–2003

Range of consulting programmes focussed on designing and implementing business, market and organisational strategies, mostly in the telecoms and hi-tech industries:

- Designed and implemented the business and marketing strategy for a voice and data services start up business for a Swiss cable operator to supplement its analogue telephony and TV business
- Led a strategic outsource evaluation for a UK mobile operator

TXU (Eastern Group) 1997–1999

A portfolio of international strategy and consultancy roles for this integrated energy company including designing the operational strategy for a JV with TXU's Taiwanese partner for a 550MW power station and lead on the regulatory and communications aspects of creating a pan-European energy trading alliance.

Coopers & Lybrand (UK) (PwC) 1988–1992 and 1995

Wide UK and international consulting experience working in many areas of the public, private and NGO sectors, focussing on business and organisational strategy. Typical projects included:

- Diversification strategy for the General Council of the Bar, in the context of a deregulated legal services market
- Organisational strategy for the Aga Khan Rural Support programme in Pakistan
- Evaluation of the Zambian government's public sector restructuring programme, carried out for the World Bank

Extensive study of the laws governing information security in the EU with a view to producing a draft directive

Coopers and Lybrand (Hong Kong) 1992–1994

Seconded into the Finance Branch of the Hong Kong government to support the implementation of public sector reform. Worked with the senior management of 20 executive departments to decentralise public finances and to create performance targets and indicators which were then integrated with existing management processes.

Education and other

London Business School (1996) Sloan Fellowship Programme (MSc Management) Distinctions in Strategy, Marketing Communications

Inns of Court School of Law (1987) Barrister (non-practising)

King's College, London University (1984–1987) Law LLB Hons. 2:1

National Centre for Diversity, CEO of the Year, 2021

Management Consultancies Association, judge, MCA consulting awards, 2017 to 2022

Crisis, trustee, 2001–2008

Formal Minutes

Wednesday 23 April 2025

Members present:

Lauren Edwards (in the Chair)

Markus Campbell-Savours

Charlotte Cane

Sam Carling

Peter Lamb

Michelle Welsh

Appointment of the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

Draft Report (Appointment of the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 19 read and agreed to.

Papers were appended to the Report as Appendices 1 to 5.

Resolved, That the Report be the First Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available (Standing Order No. 134)

Adjournment

Adjourned till Tuesday 29 April at 9.30 am

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Wednesday 23 April 2025

Paula Sussex CBE, the preferred candidate for the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

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List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Session 2024–25

Number	Title	Reference
1st Special	Transforming the UK's Evidence Base: Government, UKSA, ONS and OSR responses	HC 757