

Debbie Abrahams MP
Chair, Work and Pensions Select Committee Pensions

Sent by email

5 February 2026

Dear Debbie,

I write following Secretary of State's statement on 29 January setting out a new decision in response to our women's State Pension age investigation report.

I welcome the Department's acceptance of our finding of maladministration and the apology from the Secretary of State. However, I remain disappointed that that acceptance is still qualified in that it mischaracterises our findings in relation to the effectiveness of letters and appears to tie that mischaracterisation into the reasoning. I am also disappointed with the Government's decision not to accept our recommendations in respect to remedy, and with the lack of engagement with my office ahead of the statement on an issue of such significance for those affected.

I stand by the conclusions of the report. Our recommendations were made following careful consideration of the evidence and established principles of fairness and proportionality. They reflected the real and lasting impact of poor communication on many women's ability to plan their working lives, finances, and retirement. Our recommended remedy was predicated on the loss of opportunity. Despite accepting maladministration, the Government has dismissed the associated remedy by effectively raising the standard or threshold for loss beyond the level that we considered appropriate.

The Government state that it would be 'impractical' to design a reliable compensation scheme, and, that a flat-rate scheme could cost large sums without effectively targeting those who truly suffered injustice. The statement goes into considerably more detail as to why the Government takes this view and this is helpful. However, it appears that the detail is still focussed on high level considerations. It is difficult to test whether the work included design of a hypothetical scheme or schemes to the extent necessary to establish with more confidence whether the assumptions set out about costs were borne out.

The Government's suggestion and apparent reliance on the suggestion that we 'did not properly consider' whether earlier letters would have been read or recalled is disappointing, as this was not a claim we made nor one required for us to reach our conclusions.

I hope that work on the Action Plan and activities to address the failures that the Department has acknowledged occurred will now resume at pace after the delay. Embedding the lessons

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from this investigation into the Department's culture and practice is essential if similar failings are to be avoided in the future. I therefore welcome the commitment to resume work on the Action Plan, to develop an improved communications strategy, and to provide clear and sufficient notice of changes to State Pension age. I have suggested that the plan be worked on in a more collaborative manner to help avoid the impression of inaction. These steps will be critical to restoring confidence and improving the quality of public administration.

My office is content to provide advice and updates on DWP's progress to your committee. In particular, I expect the Action Plan to be robust, transparent, measurable and focused on delivering lasting improvement.

I hope this letter assists the Committee in its consideration of the Government's response and its wider implications for public administration and accountability. I will also be writing to the Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee given their oversight role for our reports and recommendations. I remain available to provide further evidence or clarification as required to support Parliament in its scrutiny.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Paula Sussex', written over a horizontal line.

Paula Sussex
Ombudsman and Chair
Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman