

# The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

Candidate pack  
January 2025

# Welcome letter from the Clerk of the House of Commons

Thank you for your interest in becoming the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, which is one of the most important and challenging roles in the public service.

At the heart of the role is the principle that when something goes wrong in public services, people deserve not only an apology, but also action from the organisations concerned to repair the problem and to learn from the mistake.

When people feel that they have been let down by public bodies or suffered injustice and believe that the original complaints system has not properly addressed their concerns, they can turn to the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman provides an independent and impartial service making final decisions on complaints from citizens that government departments, the NHS in England, or a range of other public bodies in the UK have not provided a good enough service or have not acted properly or fairly.

This is a demanding and high-profile role, with a significant element of Parliamentary and public scrutiny and challenge. It is a unique opportunity to work closely with Parliament in holding those delivering public services to account, as well as to help drive improvements across government in providing high quality services to the public.

The credibility of the Ombudsman's reports to Parliament on individual or systemic maladministration hinges on robust investigations of the highest standard, so that complainants can have confidence in the findings, and the public services concerned will take action on the recommendations. Maintaining these high standards will require effective and motivating leadership and consistent development of, and engagement with, staff - who are dealing with what are often difficult, sensitive or traumatic cases.

We welcome applications from candidates with a range of personal and professional backgrounds who can demonstrate that they meet the competences required. There is no rigidly-prescribed background for an effective Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, and there is scope for people to bring their own unique style to the role.

We are above all seeking an individual who is a proven leader with strategic vision, has excellent judgement, communicates effectively, and is of the utmost probity. In holding others to account you will have to set the highest standards for yourself and your organisation so that you generate confidence and trust among the customers you serve, in Parliament, and among the organisations on whom you pass judgement.

I do hope you consider applying for this influential position. If you believe that you have the experience and qualities we are seeking, we very much look forward to hearing from you.

**Tom Goldsmith, Clerk of the House of Commons**

## 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 pre-appointment 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.

If you do not receive an acknowledgement of your application within 48 hours, please contact Kirsten Hasseriis on 020 7426 3991 or via [kirsten.hasseriis@gatenbysanderson.com](mailto:kirsten.hasseriis@gatenbysanderson.com).

**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 2025
References	From 17 February 2025
Final 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](#).

## Contact Information

If you have any queries about any aspect of the appointment process, need additional information or wish to have an informal and confidential discussion, then contact our advisers at GatenbySanderson: Stephanie Wilson on 07880 382745 or Zoe Bennett on 07778 178265.

GatenbySanderson will respect the privacy of any initial approach or expression of interest in this role, whether formal or informal.