

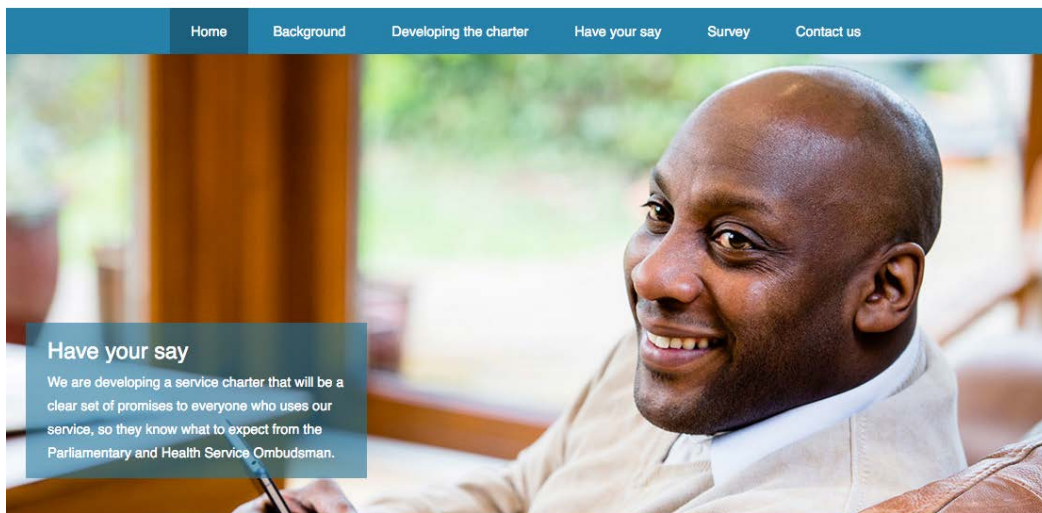
Creating a Service Charter for the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

Report on the research and consultation programme

February 2016



Our new service charter:
A public dialogue



The authors would like to thank all the people who participated in the research, giving their time to provide feedback on the service charter by filling in surveys, taking part in interviews or workshops or writing to the research team directly. The Service Charter project team at the Ombudsman have also helped to facilitate access to many of the research activities and without their support many aspects of this initial consultation would not have been possible.

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1. Introduction

The Office for Public Management (OPM) was commissioned by the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) in November 2014 to design and run a set of consultation and research activities around the development of a new service charter.

The PHSO makes the final decisions on complaints about the NHS in England, UK government departments and other public organisations in England. In 2013-14, the organisation began a process of modernisation to provide a more effective service for customers and to have *'more impact for more people'*.¹ The changes include making the service more accessible, conducting more investigations, reducing the time it takes to decide on an investigation and improving the complaint-handling experience for the people who use the PHSO's services.

The development of a service charter is part of this process.

*'We are determined to modernise to meet the needs of today's customer. We have already heard that we can take too long and need to improve what and how we communicate with users... We are developing a service charter that will be a **clear set of promises to everyone who uses our service**, so they know **exactly what to expect** from the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman.'*²

1.1 The aims of the research and consultation programme

OPM is an independent, employee owned research agency, working with the public sector, the voluntary sector and health organisations to help improve the way services are delivered to the public. This often involves engaging with citizens, customers, patients, service users and stakeholders, to open up insights into their attitudes, experiences and expectations – and then using these as a basis for useful, evidence-based recommendations.

The aim of the research and consultation programme was to work with key PHSO stakeholders – customers, staff, organisations that the PHSO has the power to investigate, and advocacy groups – to co-create a draft of the service charter that people would have confidence in.

The research took place between December 2014 and January 2016. This report covers the main findings from the whole research and consultation programme.

¹ See *Delivering more impact for more people PHSO's Strategic Plan 2013-18*:
http://www.ombudsman.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0014/20714/PHSO_Strategic_plan_2013-18_FINAL.pdf

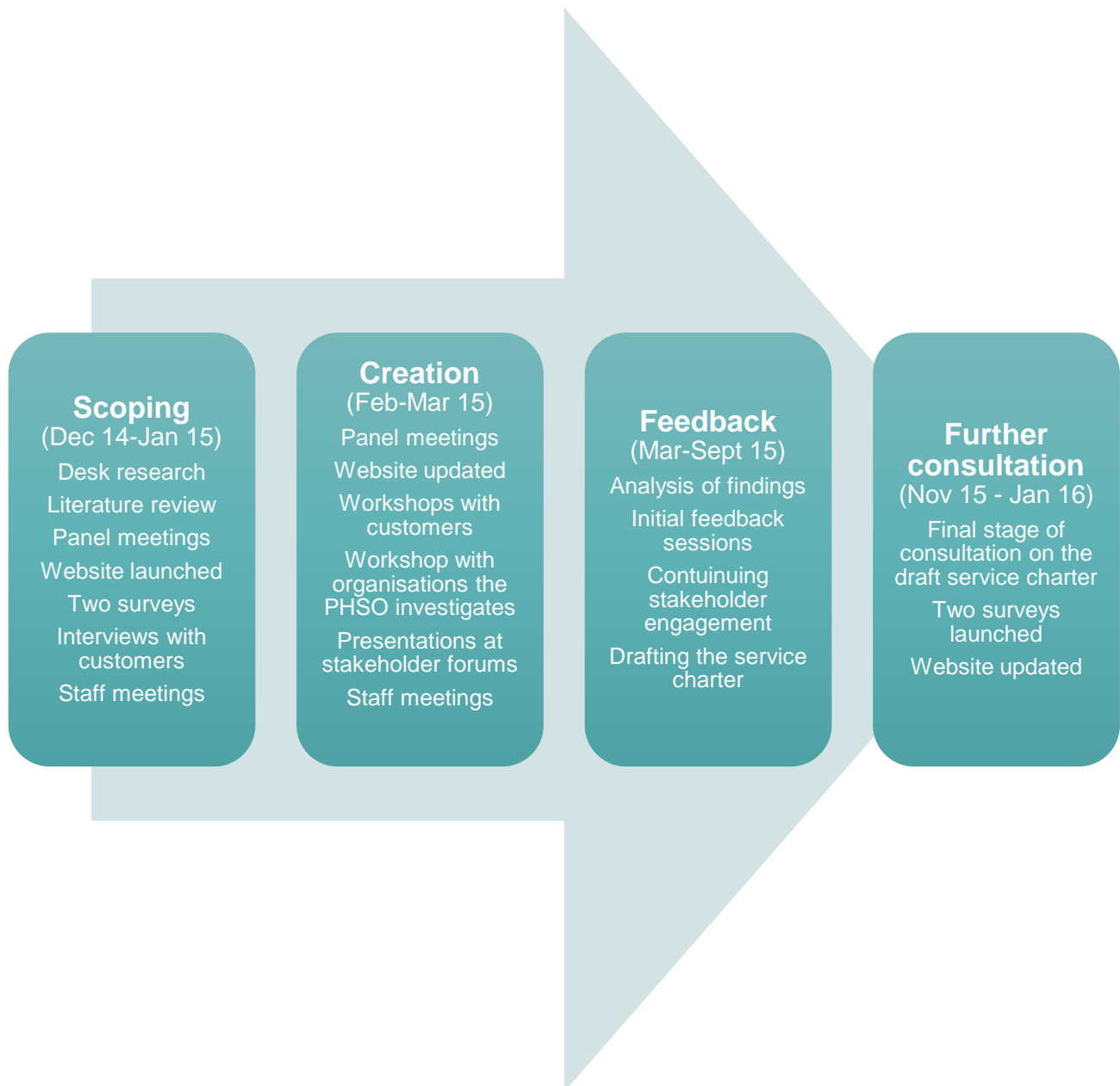
² <http://www.ombudsmanservicecharter.org.uk/>

2. Gathering views on the service charter

2.1 Overview of the research design

The research and consultation programme was designed to reach a wide range of people who were interested in getting involved or expressing their views on the development of the PHSO's service charter.

Figure 1: Research and consultation programme stages and activities



2.2 Research activities

A fuller explanation of the methodology is in Appendix 1, and the main activities are summarised below:

- **Literature review** - looking at how the PHSO currently handles complaints, how other public sector organisations handle complaints, and examples of service charters from the public and private sectors, with a particular focus on co-creation approaches
- **Panel meetings** – two consultative panels of customers (Customer Panel) and consumer, advocacy and representative groups (CAR Panel) set up by the PHSO to give feedback at every stage of the development of the service charter
- **Staff team representatives meetings** – to discuss the charter development and feedback to colleagues
- **Website:** The launch of a consultation website: www.ombudsmanservicecharter.org.uk
- **Two surveys at the start of the consultation** – a short ‘general’ one which was open to anyone on the service charter website exploring views on the PHSO and service charter; and a ‘targeted’ one which went to sample of PHSO stakeholders and everyone who had participated in the workshops, with space for open responses and feedback.
- **Customer interviews** – six in-depth phone interviews to understand the complaint journey at each stage from the individual’s perspective
- **Customer workshops** – four of these were held with current and past PHSO customers to explore their expectations for the content and format of the service charter. These took place nationally in Manchester, Birmingham and London.
- **Workshop for organisations that the PHSO has the power to investigate** – with representatives from the Cross Government Complaints Forum to understand the complaints journey from the perspective of organisations being investigated by the PHSO
- **Workshops organised by the PHSO** – three with the NHS Complaints Managers Forum, and four with the advocacy charity POhWER and its service users³
- **External meetings** – the Service Charter team at the PHSO attended events and meetings such as the PHSO Advocacy Conference; the Medical Defence Union; and the Complaints Handling, Investigating, Resolving and Learning Conference, to either run workshops or provide information and hold discussions on the service charter.

Customer feedback on the workshops:

“A worthwhile evening.”

“It’s been fantastic – really clear and positive and made me feel empowered.”

“Thanks for giving me the chance to air my views.”

³ POhWER is a charity and membership organisation. It provides information, advice, support and advocacy to people who experience disability, vulnerability, distress and social exclusion

- **Two surveys consulting on the draft service charter** – one was a short survey open to anyone; and another ‘targeted’ survey which went to the same group of people who had received the first targeted survey, as well as additional cohorts (please see appendix for further information).

2.3 Research engagement

Table 1 summarises the numbers who were engaged through the research and consultation programme:

Table 1: Research participants

Method	Number of participants	Notes
Short survey (start)	158	Open to any member of the public
Targeted survey (start)	80	Sent to a sample of customers, PHSO staff and stakeholders
Customer interviews	6	Telephone interviews
Customer panel meetings	9	4 meetings during the project – with varied attendance levels
CAR panel	7	4 meetings during the project – with varied attendance levels
Staff panel meetings and representatives	26	Met repeatedly throughout the project – with varied attendance levels
Website	1279 unique users	Figures from Google Analytics for the main points when feedback was being sought via the website
Website comments	41	Left on the website’s message board for the entire period of the consultation
Customer workshops	54	4 workshops
Workshop with organisations the PHSO has the power to investigate	10	1 workshop with Cross Government Complaints Forum
NHS Complaints Manager workshops	50	3 workshops run by PHSO
POhWER workshops	25	4 workshops run by PHSO
Presentations and Q&As	300	PHSO presentations at different conferences and meetings
Short survey (end)	88	Open to any member of the public
Targeted survey (end)	91	Sent to a sample of customers, PHSO staff and stakeholders
Total engaged	945	Not including website unique users
Total engaged	2224	Including website unique users

In total, nearly a 1000 people have been engaged in the research and consultation programme (not including website users). It is important to note that there were other activities in addition to those listed in the table as above, such as the two all staff events organised by the PHSO which involved over 400 staff members. Other stakeholders involved also fed back at multiple points – for example, through the recurring Panel meetings. Overall, there was a high level of engagement with opportunities for people to give concise feedback, or take part in more in depth activities if they wished.

“There appears to be a real commitment by the PHSO to listen to what people who may use their services think and what will make a good service. It was clear that the PHSO wants to know ‘what will good look like.’ (Consumer and advocacy group representative).

3. Developing the service charter: initial findings

The early stages of the research and consultation programme focussed on:

- 1) Understanding initial reactions and views on the role of the PHSO
- 2) Mapping the PHSO customer complaints journey and identifying what works well and not so well at each stage
- 3) Developing ideas for the content and format of the future service charter

This chapter addresses these three stages by incorporating data from the first two surveys, customer interviews, panel and staff meetings, and workshops with different PHSO stakeholders prior to the publication of the draft service charter.

3.1 Why does the PHSO need a service charter?

The PHSO is the final stage of the complaints journey. By the time many people reach the PHSO they are already feeling disillusioned, frustrated and want a resolution to their case. In common with other Ombudsman services, there will be times when people will be disappointed if their case has not been upheld or investigated.

In this context, the management of expectations regarding the role of the PHSO; transparency in how cases are handled; and the decision-making process involved is important so people are able to get closure and move on with their lives. For many who make a complaint, it is also important that services learn from mistakes to prevent them from happening again in the future.

Some people that were consulted during the research did express their satisfaction with the service they received and felt that a thorough investigation had taken place. However, the research uncovered variations in the quality of the service people reported they had experienced from the PHSO. The PHSO staff, customers, people and the organisations that use the PHSO's services and the advocacy groups who took part in the research wanted to see a real change in this regard.

From previous research undertaken by the PHSO, and the survey responses in the early stages of the consultation, it was clear that the main concerns different stakeholders had were that:

- Making a complaint should be easier and quicker
- A more consistent service should be delivered
- The PHSO needs to be more compassionate in interactions with customers
- It should be clearer as to what happens as a result of the PHSO's recommendations at the end of an investigation

People who felt they had received a poor quality of service from the PHSO expressed a lack of trust in the PHSO's service, and had little faith that taking a complaint to the PHSO will make a difference.

3.2 Views on the role of the PHSO

“Our role is to investigate complaints that individuals have been treated unfairly or have received poor service from government departments and other public organisations and the NHS in England.” (The PHSO website)

The role of the PHSO was explored with different stakeholders. One of the exercises used in the workshops with customers, and the two panel meetings was to ask participants to come up with their ideas and thoughts on the role of the PHSO through:

- What the PHSO *is*
- What the PHSO *is not*
- What the PHSO *should be...*

Looking at the views and aspirations for the PHSO expressed by all the different participants in the research there are a number of clear themes.

Awareness of the role of the PHSO

The feedback from customers in particular emphasised that the PHSO suffers from a low awareness of its role, and that it was not widely publicised.

“Not enough people know about the PHSO, what it does and what it cannot do.”
(Customer workshop)

Respondents from the organisations the PHSO investigates reflected that even amongst this group of stakeholders, the PHSO is not consistently known about – particularly amongst staff who were not directly involved in complaint handling, or those who ‘sit on the frontline’.

Across all the stakeholder groupings, it was also identified that there needed to be more communication about what the PHSO can and cannot do.

Aims and values of the PHSO

Most respondents did understand that the PHSO has an investigative role and is the last resort and final stage in a complaints process.

“I think it is important that the complaint handling of public departments can be reviewed independently.” (Organisation PHSO investigates, targeted survey)

However, many were less clear about the extent of the PHSO's powers and were not always aware that the PHSO is not a regulator or a consumer champion.

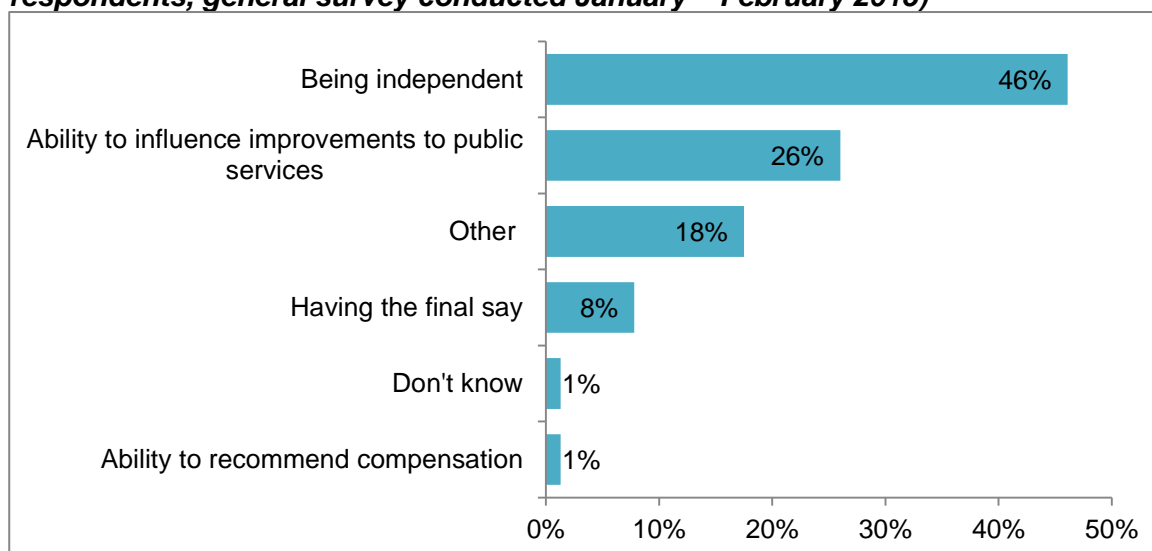
“They need to act in the best interests and behalf of complainants only.” (Anonymous web comment)

“It might be important to highlight that complaints are not always upheld in order to manage customer's expectations.” (Organisation PHSO investigates, targeted survey response).

Independence of the PHSO

In the surveys, respondents were asked for their views on the most important aspect of the PHSO's role in handling complaints about public services and **independence** was the most commonly identified theme. In the general survey, respondents were asked to choose just one response; 46% of respondents chose 'Being Independent' (see figure 2). In the targeted survey, 42% of responses also related to independence and impartiality.

Figure 2: In your opinion, what is the most important aspect of the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's role in handling complaints about public services? (Base: 154 respondents, general survey conducted January – February 2015)



The independence of the PHSO was also a key theme in the discussions with staff, organisations and advocacy groups. However, even though the independent role of the PHSO was appreciated, many customers felt this did not translate into reality.

“I was worried that they would side with the big organisations and favour the hospital.” (Customer interview)

Expectations of the PHSO

Customers generally talked positively about what the PHSO was *'trying'* to do and valued the PHSO's potential to make improvements to public services and prevent errors and wrong-doing from occurring again in the future.

However, amongst those participants who had more negative impressions and experiences of the PHSO, it was clear that this was often based on their strong feelings that the PHSO was not currently fulfilling its role and meeting its expectations.

“It needs to have more clout and play a ‘deterrence role’ so that health providers do their utmost to avoid repeating the same mistakes.” (Customer workshop)

“Currently the PHSO feels remote from its customers – it needs to be closer to us.” (Customer workshop)

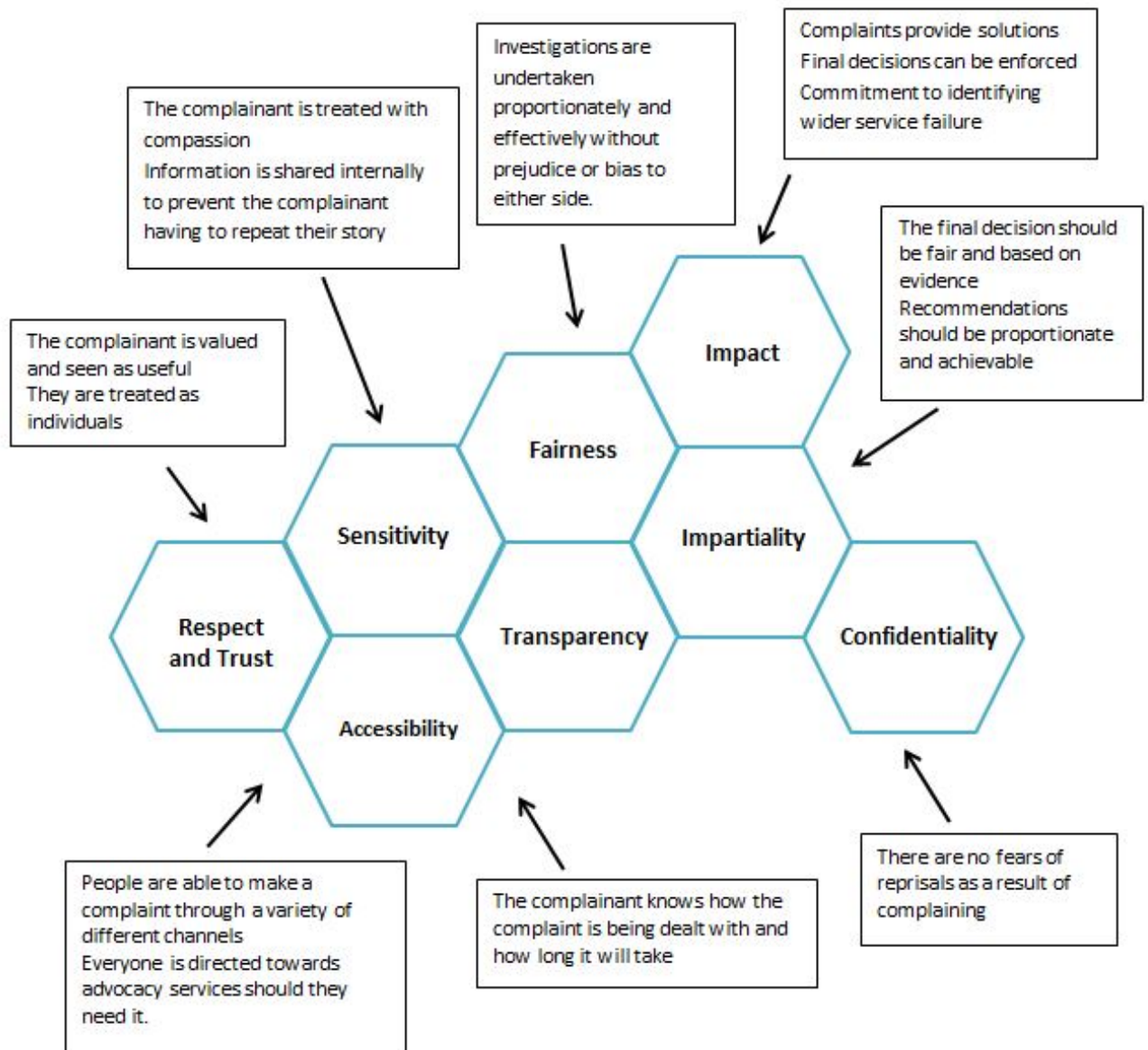
Summary of key priorities:

- Provide clarity on the PHSO’s role, what PHSO can and can’t do, PHSO powers and processes and how decisions are made
- Provide reassurance about the independence of the PHSO
- Enforce recommendations and secure compliance
- Redress the balance of power between government bodies and individuals
- Share insights from its findings – empower organisations to change
- Manage expectations – using clear language so there is no ambiguity, or chance of being misled.

3.3 The customer journey: what makes a good complaints process?

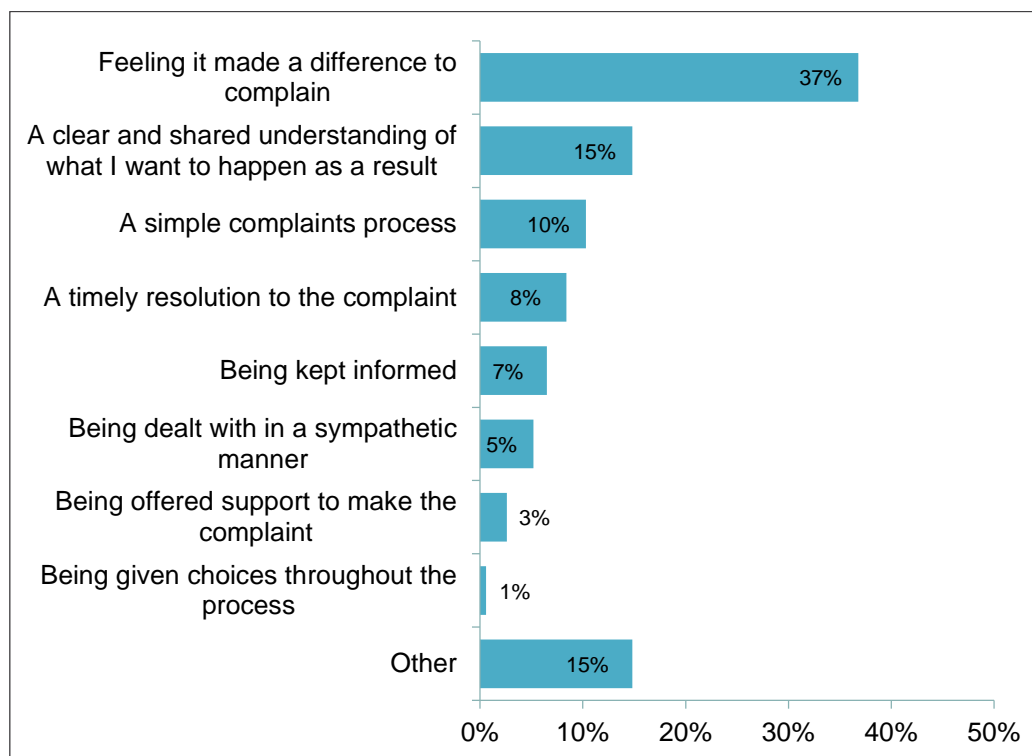
Figure 3 draws on existing literature on complaints handling, and the PHSO’s previous work in this area to summarise the key principles of a good process that are most frequently referenced.

Figure 3: Principles of good complaints handling



The scoping stage also involved examining participants’ views on good complaints processes, based on previous or current experiences either with the PHSO or elsewhere. In the general survey, respondents were asked to choose one response that most closely matched their views. *‘Feeling that it made a difference’* was important for 37% of the respondents, which gave an insight into the motivations for complaining as well as the process itself.

Figure 4: What makes the experience of complaining a good one? (Base: 155 respondents, general survey conducted January – February 2015)



3.4 Views on the PHSO's investigation process and method

Participants across the panels, workshops and interviews were asked about five different stages of the customer journey in order to identify what priorities and considerations needed to be included in the future service charter. These were simplified in order to help facilitate the discussions (and therefore do not reflect the exact experience of the PHSO's complaints process): *Deciding to complain; making a complaint; dealing with the complaint; receiving the final decision and reflecting back on the experience.*

These exercises generated many responses that drew on individual existing experiences, but also expressed what an 'ideal world' might look like. The main themes are explored below.

Consistency

Customers valued having a single point of contact throughout, and reassurance that a clear process was in place to minimise any inconsistencies in the way the case was handled, or if an investigator or member of the PHSO staff moved on. They wanted to be reassured that the details surrounding the case would not be lost.

"Listening to some customers they clearly have had varying degrees of service experience from different staff here... As an organisation we really need to make sure that customers are consistently receiving the same level of customer service." (Staff feedback on a customer workshop)

Representatives from the organisations the PHSO investigates also felt that consistency was important – and their experiences of the process can vary depending on the investigator. They reported that at times they were unclear about why a decision had been reached, including how financial remedy had been calculated.

Summary of key priorities:

- Provide clarity on how the PHSO applies assessment criteria
- Minimise any inconsistencies or differences in the way that cases are handled

A fair, robust and proportionate approach

“They thoroughly examine the case and get to the bottom of it.” (Customer, targeted survey)

Many customers said that they wanted to enter the process trusting the PHSO’s ability to get hold of the evidence needed for the investigation. They felt that the PHSO must use the powers at its disposal to ensure that evidence is not hidden or withheld in an investigation.

“I expect them to play an independent role, look at both sides of the argument and make a decision. They have the power to get evidence from both sides.” (Customer interview)

Some customers in the workshops said that they wanted the PHSO’s processes to be clearer and more transparent. They talked about the opportunity for more open dialogue between all parties involved in the complaint to which could then contribute to an increased sense of fairness in the process. This could provide the chance to clarify facts and challenge if needed. They also valued being able to see in the final report what evidence had been included, how it had been interpreted, what each side had said and how the final decision had been reached.

“The Trust were selective in what they put forward – and the PHSO just accepted it without question. I felt my experience should be given equal weight to the Trust’s version of events.” (Customer interview)

Staff feedback addressed the issue of proportionate investigations – accepting that complex cases needed to be dealt with differently and there needed to be flexibility to adapt processes to account for the scale of the case.

Summary of key priorities:

- Customers should know more about what evidence was being provided by the organisation being investigated so they could give their view on where the gaps are
- The PHSO should be more thorough and comprehensive with their investigations, be more proactive in questioning public service bodies and obtaining information

- Demonstrate that comments have been taken into account
- A clear explanation of the decision should be provided

Accessibility

Customers expressed that the PHSO's complaints process can be difficult to navigate, is not easy to access and involves complicated forms and documents. People reported not being routinely signposted to advocacy services when they make contact with the PHSO. It was also suggested in the POhWER workshops that PHSO staff handling complaints would benefit from more disability awareness training.

Respondents felt there should be more information and signposting towards the PHSO in GP surgeries and hospitals, and other government agencies such as Jobcentre Plus.

Feedback included needing to make the complaints form more focused and straightforward, with clear prompts to guide what information is needed. Customers wanted to feel reassured about using the PHSO's services, and that it will be worth complaining.

People with complaints about a government department are referred via their MP. Apart from in one case, this was seen by participants as 'humiliating', 'a hurdle' and a cause of delays.

Summary of key priorities:

- People should be able to find out about the PHSO and its resources easily
- People should be able to reach the PHSO via their preferred method
- People should be able to initiate complaints and then come back to them later
- The PHSO needed to be far more consistent in advising people where to access specialist help from, and make 'reasonable adjustments' based on the health and emotional needs of customers
- Produce a self-help pack for people to take away when they approach the PHSO

3.5 Views on the service the PHSO provides

The following themes were highlighted by stakeholders on the nature of the service provided by the PHSO.

Timely decisions

A lot of the feedback emphasised the importance of the PHSO being able to respond more quickly and deal with investigations more speedily. For customers, it could often be an anxious and traumatic time waiting for a resolution. Customers also felt that certain parts of the process were out of proportion in terms of timescales:

“I was only given a fortnight to comment on the draft – when they had taken over 2 months to even allocate the case an investigator! The draft report wasn’t sent to my advocacy service either.” (Customer interview)

Representatives from organisations the PHSO investigates wanted to feel certain that the investigation was progressing and not dragging on, and appreciated clarity over timescales in the communications they had with the PHSO. Many also appreciated that a thorough investigation might take time and that it might be hard to give guarantees in every case.

“Tighter timescales for concluding investigations so that the organisation being investigated and the complainant do not feel like the investigation is dragging on.” (Organisation investigated by PHSO, targeted survey)

“A specific (realistic) timescale commitment, for each stage of our process.” (PHSO staff, targeted survey)

Summary of key priorities:

- Providing information about the process with likely or average times – particularly reducing the time for investigations to start
- Being given an appropriate amount of time to provide evidence

Information and communication

Feedback from some respondents was that the PHSO needs to be better at communicating with customers in a way that is sensitive, tailored to their case and circumstances and agreed with them at the start of the process.

“I wanted to be able to speak to people directly if I needed to.” (Customer workshop)

This should also apply to the organisations the PHSO investigates. The principle of ‘private but not secret’, and avoiding long periods of silence was also important.

Many of the greatest problems participants had experienced came from feeling that communication had been inadequate throughout the process, although this was not uniformly the case in the feedback:

“Very helpful, keep you informed of the progress of the case.” (Customer targeted survey)

It was identified that it was important to be flexible, as people’s preferences for communication methods would vary – for example, face to face contact was important for some especially when communicating a decision at the end of a complex case, whereas others were fine with email. In general, participants did not want to be called out of the blue and asked to discuss their case.

Reducing jargon was also identified as an important factor – this was a particular issue around the decisions with ‘upheld’ and ‘partly upheld’ requiring further explanation in terms of actual outcomes. Organisations and the consumer and advocacy groups in particular felt that the reports needed to be clearer and more succinct.

“I would say the most difficult thing I heard was that had our communication been better - both in terms of frequency or the agreement with the customer on the amount of contact, but mainly just in the way we explain our role and process and manage expectations - then I believe the majority of people's unhappiness would have been resolved.” (PHSO staff feedback from a customer workshop)

Summary of key priorities:

- Doing more to help people make informed choices about whether or not to complain to the PHSO
- Sensitive communication, agreed beforehand
- Plain English
- Regular updates on what is happening during the case
- Clear explanations if the focus of an investigation is changing
- An agreed balance of communication between the PHSO and all parties
- Warning of when the draft report is due so this does not appear out of the blue
- Everyone has a clear understanding of what is needed and by when
- Customers should clearly understand the next steps, including what is likely to happen and what the PHSO’s role will be

Compassionate in approach and tone

Evidence from the research and engagement exercise suggests that the PHSO needs to provide a better experience for people by being more sensitive, empathetic, supportive and listening. It should recognise the process can be emotional – for example, if dealing with illness, or grief. It was identified as being important for staff to ask customers what outcomes they are looking for. People wanted to feel welcome and taken seriously when they get in touch with the PHSO, and reassured that they know what is happening as their complaint is dealt with.

Compassion was also important in receiving the final decision. Customers wanted to be prepared for the decision and for it to be communicated sensitively, with an opportunity to talk to someone about it if necessary.

“They need to move from standard formulaic updates to on-going involvement and discussion.” (Customer workshop)

There was also recognition of the need for balance, with participants appreciating that sympathy and compassion do not mean taking sides, or being remote.

Summary of key priorities:

- People want to feel that they have been listened to and treated with empathy, and taken seriously
- Customers should have ongoing support if necessary and should understand the process of having their case reviewed, if they wish
- Consistently sharing reports with advocacy organisations representing customers
- Recognising the need for advocacy at the end of the process, not just the beginning

3.6 Customer journey principles

Looking across the findings, it was apparent that a number of key themes underpin a lot of the comments and feedback on the customer journey from the different PHSO stakeholders.

Transparency

A lot of the discussions centred on robust methods that people on all sides could understand.

Feedback from participants indicated that they wanted the PHSO's processes to be clear and transparent. The PHSO needs to explain its processes and decisions, and how it has involved people in them, to increase understanding and confidence in the process. One suggestion from PHSO staff was for a simple flowchart of the complaints journey to help people see the overview of the whole process.

Respondents felt that the PHSO also needs to explain to all parties the role and experience of their investigating team and any external experts on the case.

“The PHSO needs to establish credibility and authority of its experts, how it appoints them what process it goes through.” (Customer workshop)

Summary of key priorities:

- Improve trust and confidence in the PHSO processes by sharing more detail on the new service model
- There should be assurance on the credibility and authority of the PHSO experts, how they are appointed

Compliance

Whilst customers felt that the PHSO should have the authority and power to enforce changes and make a difference, many felt that this was not happening in practice.

Organisations wanted more support from the PHSO at the recommendation stage. They wanted the PHSO to be involved to help them create a plan to implement the recommendations and to be clear about what was ‘recommended’ and what was ‘required’.

However, it was felt that for organisations to make real changes, being chased early on to provide proof that recommendations had been implemented, could also lead to the changes being rushed. Non-health organisations reflected that in the past there used to be an action plan for recommendations shared with the customer and MP and perceived this had become less common.

Summary of key priorities:

- Customers want to feel confident that the recommendations made will help to improve the services they are complaining about, including the PHSO’s ability to enforce these
- Customers want to be kept up-to-date with what has changed as a result of their complaint
- Follow up on recommendations
- Demonstrate how the PHSO’s complaint handling has a positive effect on service improvements

Accountability

Feedback from participants emphasised that there needs to be clarity on who the PHSO is accountable to and what the implications are if service standards and commitments are not adhered to or met. Participants suggested Parliament, the Prime Minister and select committees when discussing this issue.

Consumer and advocacy group representatives in particular were also keen to see a form of external scrutiny and audit - this could include annual independent reviews, auditing of a sample of reports, as well as being a model of openness with Board meetings in public and non-voting observers from stakeholder groups.

“At the moment, the PHSO is judge and jury over its own decisions... we think it would help public confidence if there were at least some independent involvement, even in an advisory capacity, in the review process.” (CAR panel member)

Summary of key priorities :

- The development of external involvement in the quality assurance of PHSO's complaints handling

Based on these findings, the priorities for each stage of the customer journey (used in the research fieldwork) were summarised (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Key messages for each stage of the customer journey.

Deciding to complain

- Customers should be easily able to access information about the PHSO, its role, and the service it provides
- Customers should be reassured about using the PHSO's services, and confident that it is worth complaining about a public organisation.

Making the complaint

People should expect to be:

- Able to contact the PHSO via their preferred method, listened to and taken seriously, and have a sympathetic ear
- Supported to make their complaint, helped get to the core of their problem and the outcome they would like, with help to find advocacy services if needed.
- Able to understand how the complaint process works
- Reassured that that their complaint will not affect their use of their local service.

Keeping up to date

People should expect to be:

- Kept up to date about the progress of their case, including timescales, and able to contact their caseworker if they have questions
- Able to receive communications that are easy to understand and appropriate to their case
- Confident in the ability of their caseworker and any expert advisors
- Confident that the PHSO will be able to obtain all the necessary evidence needed for the case and make sound judgements where evidence may be missing

Receiving the final decision

People should expect to be:

- Able to receive a draft report at an arranged time and have enough time to review it and make comments.
- Able to receive a final report that clearly explains the decision and how this was reached
- Confident that an independent, robust and thorough investigation has taken place.
- Able to clearly understand the next steps, and to have ongoing support if necessary
- Able to understand how to have their case reviewed, if they want.

Reflecting back on the experience

People should expect to be:

- Confident that the recommendations the PHSO makes will help to improve the services they are complaining about, including the PHSO's ability to enforce these
- Kept up-to-date with what has changed as a result of their complaint
- Able to have a sense of closure and acceptance and feel that the system works (even if the decision wasn't what they would have wanted)

3.7 Developing the service charter

What are the benefits of service charters?

The benefits of service charters in improving service quality are evident in terms of providing a guarantee for consumers of standards, making services more responsive through consultation and being more accountable through the ongoing monitoring of standards.

There are a number of key principles which help to ensure that service charters are robust and can have impact:

- **Co-creation approaches** – involving users and stakeholders in the development phase of the charter and subsequent revisions. This provides an opportunity for communication and feedback, but also potentially leads to greater endorsement through having developed a ‘contract’ jointly. The Institute of Customer Service highlight the main groups that organisations should seek information from, including management, employees, existing, past and future customers and competitors.⁴
- **Measuring performance** – service charters have to have mechanisms in place to monitor and review progress so everyone is clear whether or not the organisation is adhering to its promises.
- **Employee and user focused** – as staff will ‘live and breathe’ the charter in their day to day practices, and need to understand why it is in place, what role they play within it and how they can continue to provide feedback.

A number of service charters in the public and private sector were reviewed looking in particular for examples that had been co-created. The main points of interest were:

- **Length** - the charters are predominantly short – between 1-4 pages
- **Priorities** - many reflect the fact that the charters have been based on feedback from customers – ‘*You told us what is important...*’
- **Audience** - most balance the responsibilities of the organisation with the responsibilities and rights of customers and do not just cover service standards
- **Timescales** - there is an indication of what the customer should expect in terms of how long organisational commitments will take
- **Escalation** - it is common for charters to set out clearly what customers should do and what their options are if they are still not happy with the service they have received

⁴ <https://www.instituteofcustomerservice.com/1849-2156/Setting-customer-service-standards.html>

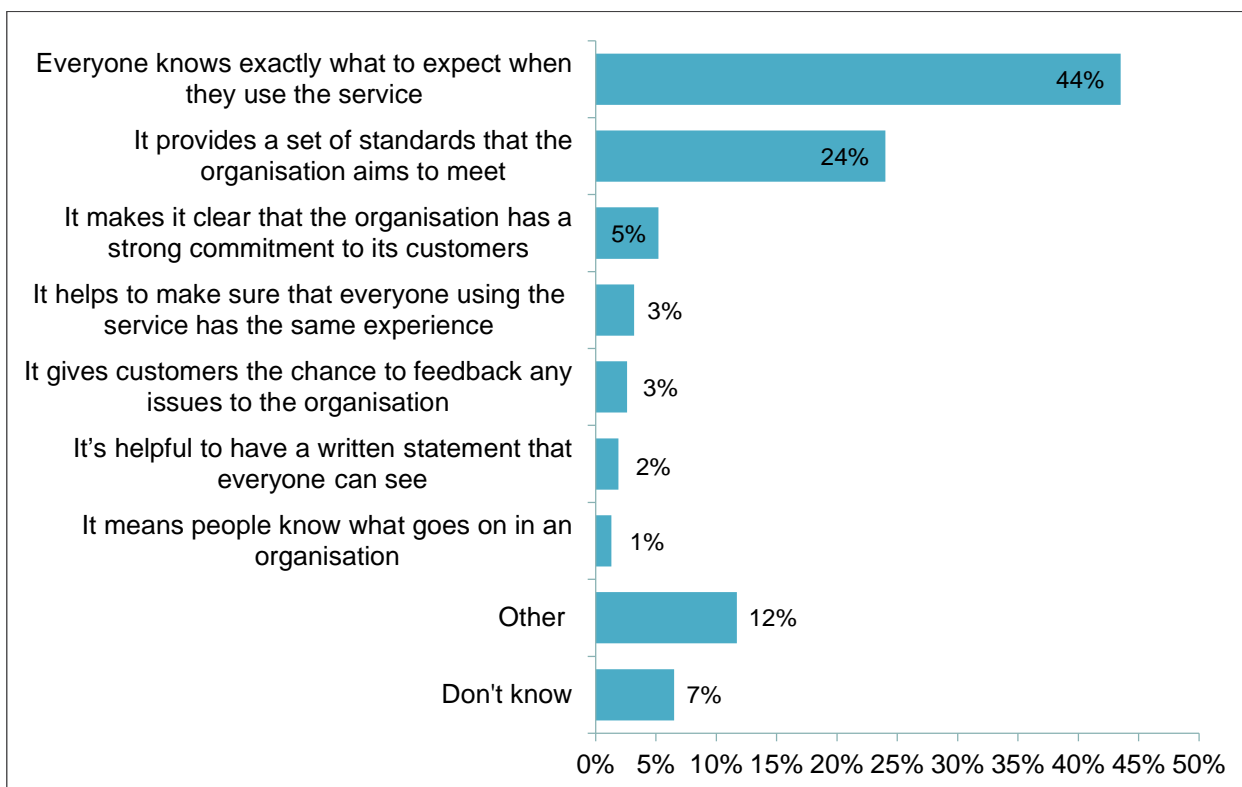
Initial views on creating a service charter for the PHSO

The first two surveys at the beginning of the research and consultation programme asked people to reflect on what the most important function of a service charter might be and 44% indicated *'everyone knows exactly what to expect when they use the service'*, with 24% choosing *'it provides a set of standards that the organisation aims to meet'*. Amongst the survey respondents, there appeared to be consensus on the value of a service charter in establishing organisational commitments – which are beneficial for both staff and customers.

Members of staff responding were even more strongly in favour of *'everyone knows exactly what to expect when they use the service'* with 78% opting for that function, and this was linked to helping to communicate what the PHSO can and cannot do:

"A transparent document that sets out what complainants and organisations can expect." (Staff, targeted survey)

Figure 6: What is the most important function of a service charter? (Base: 154 respondents, general survey conducted January – February 2015)



Participants in the research did understand and appreciate the rationale behind creating a service charter, and were broadly positive about the opportunity it presented.

"A really positive step to publicly set out what we do." (Staff, targeted survey)

Many saw the charter as a chance for the PHSO to be more customer centric and adopt a more human approach. However, there was also considerable scepticism and concern about what impact it might have. Questions included:

- How will it lead to actual changes in the service?

- What makes the charter different from what has come before?
- How will we know whether the PHSO is keeping its promises in the charter?

The main concerns were that the success of the charter would entirely rest on its content, wording and measurement – and that the PHSO would need to inspire confidence and trust in the charter.

The content of the service charter

During the discussions from the workshops and panels on the service charter, participants were encouraged to articulate the promises they would like to see as part of the service charter. These promises largely centred on the commitments that customers would like to see in place at each stage of the customer journey, as well as reflections from staff on what they felt would work in practice. The service charter discussions also focused considerably on the behaviour of all involved.

Participants stressed that it was important to reflect that the service charter has been developed based on the priorities that different PHSO stakeholders have said are important – e.g. compassion, respect, empathy, sensitivity, being fair to both sides, and the behaviour expected of all parties.

It was suggested that the service charter should:

- Contain pledges that are achievable and realistic, *not aspirational*

“As long as it’s clear and the people within the organisation feel engaged with it and sign up to it – they’ve got to own it and feel supported to do it.” (Customer interview)
- Articulate the PHSO’s commitment to fairness, independence and equality

“We are independent so must ensure that we treat all parties to the complaint...equally and with respect so I would like to see this clear balance evidenced in the charter.” (Staff, targeted survey)
- Make clear it the PHSO neither a champion of the people, *and* not on the side of organisations - making it explicit that the PHSO takes a ‘fresh look’, and aims for resolution.
- Clarify who the PHSO is accountable to and what the implications are if the pledges made in the service charter are not met
- Be regularly reviewed – participants tended to see the service charter as a live document that would require amending ensure that it remained relevant.

In addition, participants felt that there is a real opportunity for the service charter to provide clarification of the process of complaining to the PHSO and to really spell out what happens from the first point of contact, through to how investigations are conducted, and the next steps. This should include an indication of timescales where possible – as long as these remained realistic and did not raise people’s expectations in a way that might not be met.

All stakeholders talked about behaviour in the service charter discussions. This involved setting expectations of acceptable behaviour (of customers and staff) on both 'sides'. The most commonly used words in these discussions were around respect, honesty, and politeness in the interactions between staff, customers and organisations that the PHSO has the power to investigate.

The format of the service charter

Participants in the research discussed the format and style of the service charter. The views centred on the need for it to be:

- **Short** – 1-2 sides at most. If a longer version is needed this should be linked to from the shorter document
- **Accessible** – in plain English, jargon free, with any complicated terms defined. It should be available in different languages, easy to read versions, and not be entirely text heavy with the use of graphics to help guide people through.
- **Poster format** – it should be capable of being translated into a poster, leaflet or pledge card which can be displayed in NHS and government buildings or handed out.
- **Tone** – the 'look and feel' should be welcoming, whilst retaining a degree of formality.

Service charter recommendations

Based on the findings from the first two stages of the research and consultation, the recommendations were that the service charter should be a public facing vision, with simple commitments that people can understand from a starting point of not having used the service.

The charter needs to speak to the three main stakeholder groups – customers, staff and the organisations that the PHSO has the power to investigate.

Priorities for the content of the PHSO's service charter

What you can expect from the PHSO:

- Clarify the PHSO's **role** to people and the organisations it investigates
- Outline the **service promises** for each stage of the customer journey, with information on:
 - *Timescales* – agreed and appropriate to the case
 - *Communication* – regular, clear and in plain English and agree with customer how and when
 - *Investigation method* – clear and transparent, sensitive and proportionate
 - *Decision making* – explain final decision and how it has been reached

What the PHSO expect – responsibilities:

- Customers – to be respectful and polite to staff, and honest and timely in providing

information

- Organisations – provide all the information asked for, adhere to agreed timescales, be open honest and transparent, continue to deal with customers without prejudice, implement recommendations made

Complaints about the PHSO

- A section that clearly states what the next steps are for customers if they disagree with the decision or have concerns about the service

Measuring success

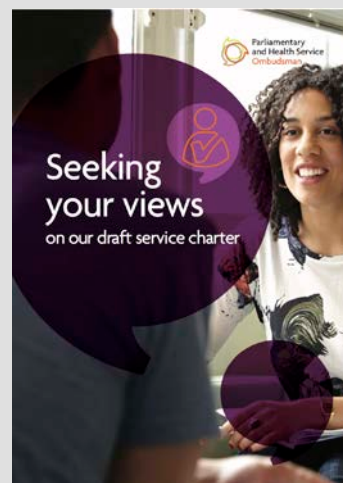
- A clear statement on how people will know that the aims of the service charter are being met

4. Findings from the final stages of the consultation

For the final stages of the consultation, the PHSO produced a draft service charter (see Appendix 2) based on the feedback received from people who have experience of its service, the organisations it investigates and its staff.

The main sections of the draft service charter

- **What we do**
- **Our promises to you:**
 - When you contact our service
 - When we carry out an investigation
 - Throughout our contact with you
 - Making a difference
 - Listening and learning to improve our service
- **Expectations:**
 - What we expect from people who complain to us
 - What we expect from organisations that are complained about



Alongside engagement with PHSO staff, there were two online surveys launched to gather a final round of feedback on the draft service charter – one short ‘open’ survey that anyone could fill in, and was accessible via the service charter website. A ‘targeted’ survey was sent to a sample of customers, PHSO staff, organisations that the PHSO has the power to investigate, representatives from consumer and advocacy organisations and participants in the consultation programme up to that point. The surveys were open between November 2015 and January 2016, and there were 179 responses during this period. Appendix 1 provides more details of who the respondents were.

This section summarises the findings from both surveys.

4.1 Overall views on the draft service charter

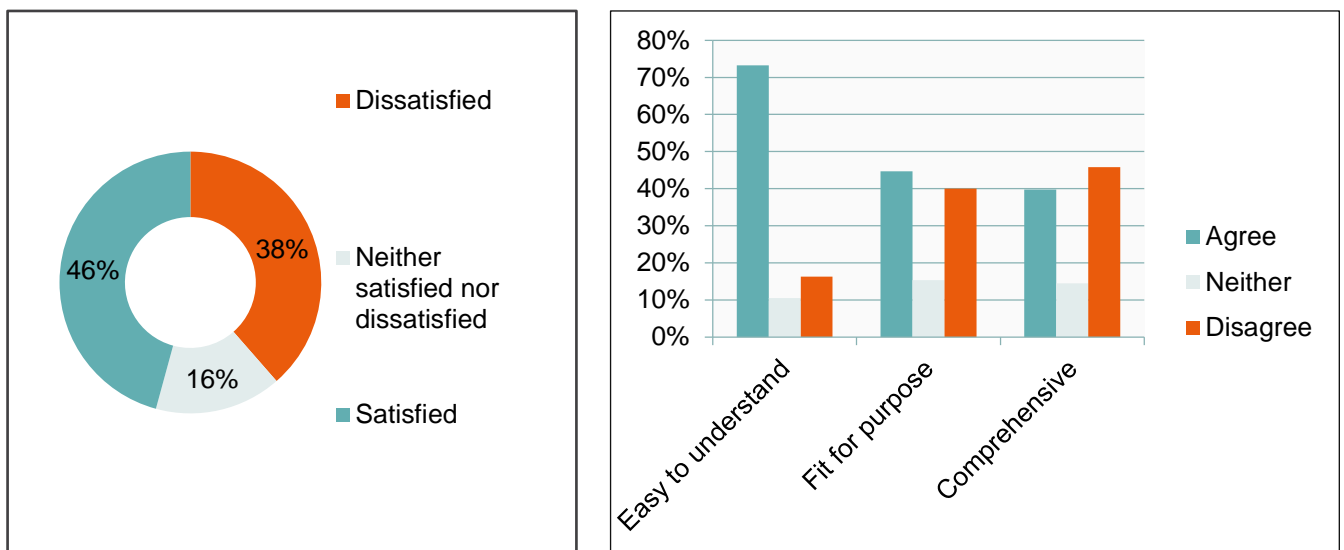
The two surveys indicate that there is positive feedback about the service charter across the different stakeholders who replied, alongside some concerns that were expressed about the content.

Open survey

Respondents to the short open survey were asked how satisfied they were overall with the content of the charter on a scale of 1-10. Almost half indicated that they were satisfied.⁵ Nearly half of these respondents also said that the draft service charter offered a clear sense of what people can expect from the PHSO.

“It is written in clear English so that complainants, advisors and PHSO staff have clear and shared expectations.” (Organisation the PHSO has the power to investigate, open survey)

**Figure 7: How satisfied are you with the draft content in the service charter?
Is the draft charter easy to understand, fit for purpose and comprehensive?
(Base=83 respondents, general survey conducted November – January 2016)**



In addition, the large majority (73%) of respondents to the open survey agreed or strongly agreed that the draft service charter was easy to understand – this was common across customers, advocacy group representatives, and those who work for an organisation the PHSO has the power to investigate. However, some responses in the open survey were less positive, particularly around the theme of comprehensiveness, with 65% feeling the draft service charter did not sufficiently cover all areas. As figure 8 shows above, only 45% agreed or strongly agreed that the draft service charter was fit for purpose. It was evident from the open comments that this was largely due to respondents feeling that greater information or detail around service or process modelling should have been included.

Many of the respondents to the open survey identified themselves as customers or advocates, and these responses tended to be more negative than open survey responses given by PHSO staff, or organisations that the PHSO has the power to investigate.

⁵ The 1-10 scale was simplified to: 1-4 dissatisfied; 5-6 neither satisfied nor dissatisfied; 7-10 satisfied

Targeted survey

Respondents to the targeted survey were guided through the draft service charter and were shown the content of each of the sections responding either 'yes', 'no' or 'don't know' on: the extent to which the text was fit for purpose; clear and easy to understand; and comprehensive. These findings show that:

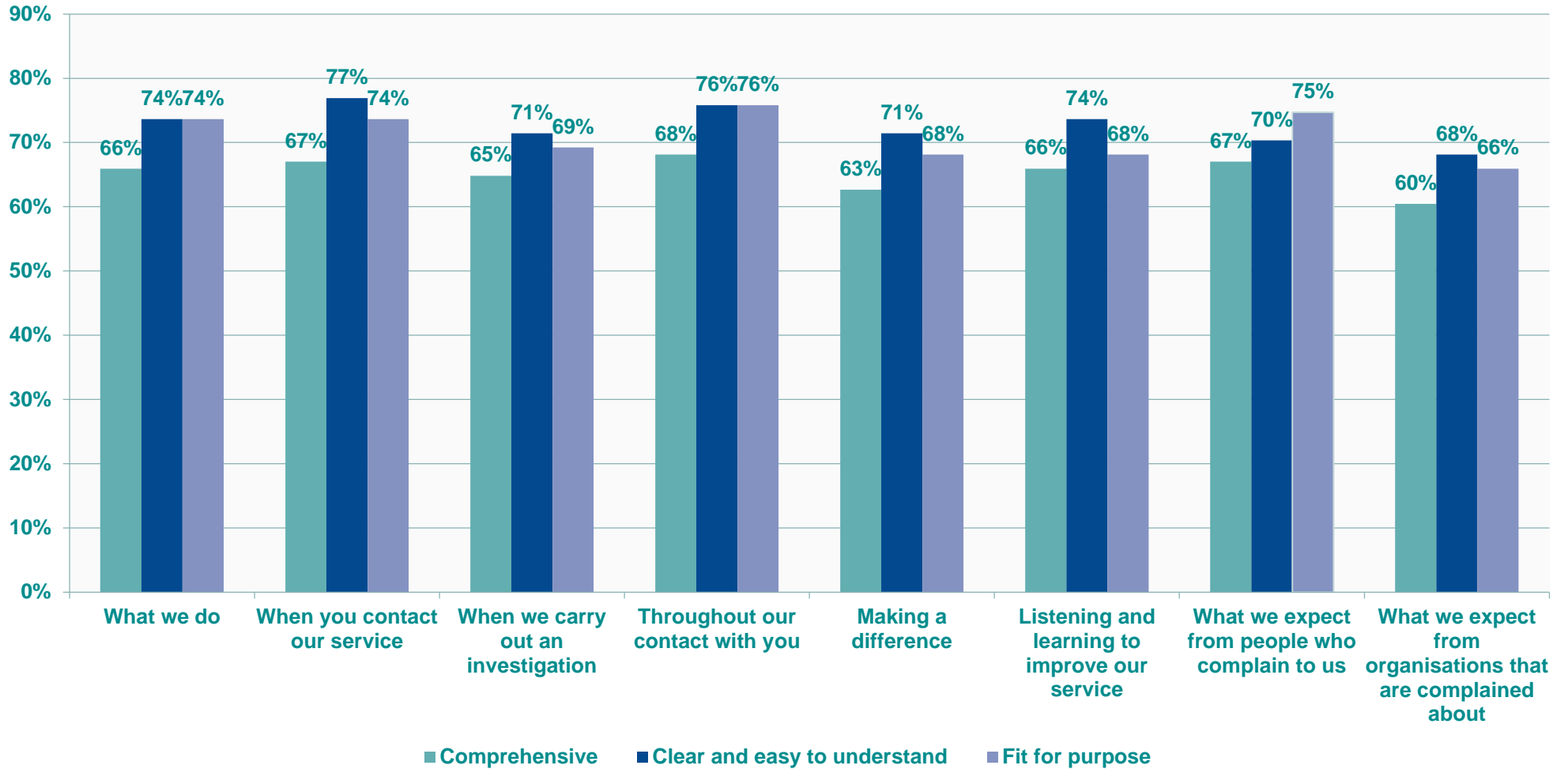
- At least 60% of respondents said the content was fit for purpose, clear and easy to understand, and comprehensive in each case, and the average across all the responses was approximately 70%.
- 'Clear and easy to understand' repeatedly scored highly across all sections of the charter (between 68%-77%).

"I think the draft charter is clear, its content is quite concise and understandable. I found the sections well laid out and easy to follow" (Organisation the PHSO has the power to investigate, targeted survey)

- The areas of the charter with the highest average scores were 'Throughout our contact with you' (73%) and 'When you contact our service' (73%).
- The lower average scores were for the sections 'what we expect from organisations that are complained about' (65%); 'making a difference' (67%) and 'when we carry out an investigation' (68%).

Figure 8 shows the percentage of respondents who selected 'yes' for each of the questions.

Figure 8: Responses to the targeted survey questions ‘Do you think... are fit for purpose, clear and easy to understand, comprehensive’



4.2 Key themes in the feedback on the draft service charter

This section explores in more detail the feedback from the open comments in both surveys to identify the main themes and issues that respondents were concerned about in relation to the draft service charter.

There was feedback that the charter felt a bit ‘bland’ or ‘vague’ in places, and lacked specific information. However, it is also worth noting that a few respondents commented that they could see the results of the workshop discussions from earlier in the research and consultation programme in the draft service charter, and were positive about the difference the charter could make when it is put into practice. Some also commented throughout that the language in the charter was clear and simple, that it clearly sets out different sections and is easy to follow.

The role and remit of the PHSO

The role and remit of the PHSO was an area where many respondents felt that there needed to be greater clarity on, and required a fuller explanation. Comments included needing to explain what the PHSO can and cannot investigate, and being clearer on what needs to happen before contacting the PHSO (for example, complaining to the organisation first, and the MP filter requirement for parliamentary cases).

“How about asking customers to confirm that they have had their complaint handled by the organisation using its complaints process?” (targeted survey response)

There was also feedback that the service charter could benefit from containing more information on why some complaints are investigated and others are not, and how this decision is reached. It was also suggested that it might be realistic in terms of expectations to provide an indication that many cases are not taken up.

“It may be helpful to explain within the Charter what your role actually is as many people believe that you will reinvestigate a complaint from scratch” (advocacy representative, open survey)

Some respondents suggested that examples of the outcomes that people might expect from PHSO investigations should be included in the charter, and that the PHSO could provide some case studies (on the website) which would help to illustrate what people might expect, and in turn, provide some more clarity over the PHSO’s role and remit.

Accessibility

There was feedback that the service charter should be more explicit about what support is available for customers from advocacy groups and other organisations.

“I would like to see that the PHSO actively works to signpost people to the support they can access to make a complaint.” (advocacy representative, open survey)

It was also felt in some cases that there should be more detail about alternative ways to complain – for example, for those with learning difficulties. Although the charter covers accessibility in terms of providing information in other languages and formats, it should emphasise other channels that people can use to bring their issue to the PHSO.

“There is no reference to the channels/adjustments which the PHSO may have available (video text relay, for example) to help individuals with particular needs bring their issue to PHSO in the first place.” (organisation the PHSO has the power to investigate, targeted survey)

Timescales

A number of comments related to the timescales of the process, and that the service charter should provide indicative or target timescales for customers.

“I believe timeframes would be helpful for complainant to understand that investigations could take some time.” (targeted survey response)

However, some respondents (from public bodies) said that there should be some mention of flexibility in timescales, and that these needed to be mutually agreed and realistic.

A number of respondents said it is important that the PHSO keeps customers updated throughout the investigation and greater clarification around this was desirable.

The investigation process

It was apparent that a number of concerns in the open comment feedback did relate to the investigation process itself – the ‘how’. This involved wanting to see more detail about the investigation model.

“Will you put your investigation model on the website and outline it as part of this service charter?” (Advocacy representative, targeted survey)

Many respondents felt that the service charter does not fully outline the complaints process, including what evidence is used in investigations, how it is shared and with whom, and how much time is allowed to comment on evidence.

“You need to make it clear that shared information will be made anonymous.” (targeted survey response)

It was also felt that explaining the powers the PHSO has to obtain evidence from public bodies would be useful.

Measuring the promises in the service charter

Respondents in the surveys were asked how they would like the promises and expectations to be communicated and reported on. Many said they would like reports with statistics about the number and type of complaints, and outcomes. This could be either monthly, quarterly, or annually; and the preference was for the PHSO to use its website for this. A few said that the important thing is that information is clear and easy to understand.

There were concerns expressed about how the promises in the service would be measured. This was alongside a fear that some of the promises could be hard to implement, and that there was no proposed mechanism in the draft charter to hold the PHSO to account.

“Will there be any mechanism for other regulators to follow up on recommendations made by the PHSO? Unless compliance is monitored there is no way to know if public services have improved as a result of the investigation.” (Advocacy representative, targeted survey)

Receiving the final decision next steps

Many felt that the service charter needed a clearer explanation of what a customer can do if they are unhappy with the PHSO’s final decision.

“What should happen is that all investigations should, whether upheld or not have direction as to what the complainant should do if they are not satisfied with the response and also what the legal steps are available.” (Organisation that the PHSO has the power to investigate, targeted survey)

5. Conclusion

Looking across the whole service charter research and consultation programme, and the findings, it was apparent that participants were broadly in support of the PHSO's aims in creating a service charter, and welcomed the opportunity to be involved in the process. Many saw the charter as a chance for the PHSO to be more customer centric in its approach.

The opportunity to build credibility and trust in the PHSO was also identified – and participants wanted to see something change as a result of the service charter, to avoid the risk of it being a 'paper exercise'. Many people expressed that they wanted to know that complaining can make a difference.

The feedback indicated that the focus for many who took part is on how the PHSO investigates – and understanding these methods and processes in more detail. The service charter project itself did not aim to provide this level of detailed information. However, the process of modernisation the PHSO is going through will be aligned with the promises in the service charter. The intention is that the PHSO will publish details of the service model alongside the final version of the charter.

This approach should help to address the fact that many common issues about the investigation process arose throughout the whole research and consultation programme, and that there were a number of issues that people were still emphasising at the final feedback stage.

The PHSO embarked on this journey to inform the service charter. They will now use the feedback in this report to finalise the service charter so there is a clear vision of what people might expect when using the PHSO's services. There will then be a period of consolidation during which they will embed, test and assess its performance against the promises in the service charter. The PHSO expects to report on its progress of delivering against the promises in the charter by late 2016.

6. Appendix

Appendix 1: Methodology

Scoping stage activities

Understanding the perspectives and experiences that people have of the PHSO within a wider context of complaints handling in public services.

This involved the following activities:

Literature review

A rapid desk review was undertaken looking at how the PHSO currently handles complaints, how other public sector organisations handle complaints, and examples of service charters from the public and private sectors, with a particular focus on co-creation approaches.

The review established a key set of principles, factors and standards in complaints handling that were directly relevant to the PHSO service. The findings from the literature review are presented throughout this report, and were also used to frame the discussion guides and workshop plans used in the primary research.

Panel meetings

Two consultative panels were set up by the PHSO with the overall aim of giving feedback at every stage of the development of the service charter:

- **A customer panel** – to listen and learn from customers' experiences. The PHSO invited eight individuals with positive and negative experiences of the service to join the panel and share their experiences and insight. The panel met three times during the scoping and creation stages of the research, and two of these meetings were designed and facilitated by OPM.
- **A Consumer Advocacy and Representative Groups (CAR) panel** – to provide an independent view on the direction of the overall approach to the development of the charter. Experts were invited by the PHSO to sit on the panel, and those represented were: Action against Medical Accidents (AvMA); The Patients Association; Disability Rights UK; The Institute of Customer Services; the Multiple Sclerosis Society; POWhER; Voiceability and Which? The panel met twice during the scoping and creation stages of the programme, and these meetings were designed and facilitated by OPM.

Staff service charter team representatives

The PHSO invited staff from across the organisation to act as team representatives to discuss the service charter development, updates on the research and consultation and to feedback on progress to their wider teams. These meetings were organised by the PHSO Service Charter project team, and met three times during the scoping and creation stage.

Website

A consultation website was launched on 12th January 2015 providing an overview of the rationale for developing a service charter and an opportunity for visitors to the site to leave comments. The website was updated at key points during the research programme with updates from the scoping stage and workshops. The website also hosted the general surveys.

Surveys

Two surveys were designed during the scoping stage. These were open between 12th January and 16th February 2015.

One of the surveys was available on the service charter website for anyone to fill in. It explored views on complaints handling in general, as well as initial views of the PHSO and service charters – from respondents who did not necessarily have prior knowledge or experience of the service. The decision was made to not collect profile data, as the intention was to create a snapshot of experiences from a self-selecting sample, and to encourage frank and honest responses. The PHSO promoted the survey via their main site, external contacts, social media and in trade press

158 respondents completed this 'general' survey:

- 25% were customers of the PHSO
- 24% were members of the public interested in the issue
- 22% worked for an organisation that the PHSO has the power to investigate
- 15% worked for the PHSO

The second survey covered similar themes, but was targeted at a sample of PHSO stakeholders who would be more familiar with the organisation. This survey allowed open responses and participants were encouraged to share their views on what they felt had gone well or not so well in their interactions with the PHSO, and to make suggestions for how the service could be improved.

The sample was derived as follows and a link to the survey was emailed to people directly:

- *Staff*: the contact details of all current PHSO staff were shared with the research team. These were organised according to PHSO pay grades, and stratified sampling was used to ensure a sample that was representative of the numbers in each pay grade.
- *Customers*: the database of 708 customers who had agreed to be contacted for research purposes were all assigned a random number in Excel. The first 100 customers with emails were chosen from this list.
- *Organisations that the PHSO has the power to investigate, and advocacy groups*: a list of stakeholders were provided by the PHSO.

80 respondents completed the 'targeted' survey:

- 37% were customers of the PHSO
- 30% were members of staff at the PHSO

- 24% worked for organisations that the PHSO has the power to investigate.

Customer interviews

The research team conducted six in-depth interviews with customers. The aim was to understand the complaint journey from the individual's perspective and to build up an appreciation of their expectations, experiences and reflections at each stage. The customers were also asked for their views on the opportunity the service charter might present for the PHSO.

Details of three of the customers were provided by the Service Charter team at the PHSO, and a further three were invited to take part in an interview having provided feedback directly to OPM shortly after the consultation launched. The interviewee breakdown was:

- Female, health complaint that went to full investigation, and was fully upheld. Positive experience.
- Male, parliamentary complaint that went to full investigation, and was fully upheld. Very positive experience.
- Female, health complaint that went to full investigation, and was partially upheld. Slightly positive experience.
- Female, health complaint that went to full investigation, and was partially upheld. Very negative experience.
- Female, health complaint that went to full investigation, and complaint not upheld. Very negative experience
- Female, health complaint that is awaiting a decision as to whether it will be investigated. Negative experience.

Creation stage activities

Exploring the customer journey in more depth and beginning to 'co-create' the service charter with stakeholders.

Ongoing meetings and engagement

As outlined above, the customer panel, CAR panel and staff group met during the creation stage of the research programme.

Customer workshops

The findings from the scoping stage were used to inform the design of a series of four workshops with customers. These aimed to challenge participants to think beyond their individual experiences and to focus on their expectations for the content and format of the service charter. The workshops:

- Provided a range of customers with an overview of the service charter development
- Explored initial reactions and the role of the PHSO

- Interrogated each stage of the customer journey to understand what a good and a bad experience might look like
- Helped to develop a series of statements for the service charter from the perspectives of customers, the PHSO and organisations that the PHSO has the power to investigate

The workshops were held in Birmingham, Manchester, North London and South London between 24th February and 5th March 2015 in the evening. The format involved small table discussions to give participants the space to reflect and work together in a productive manner. Attendees received £50 in recognition of their time.

Workshop sampling

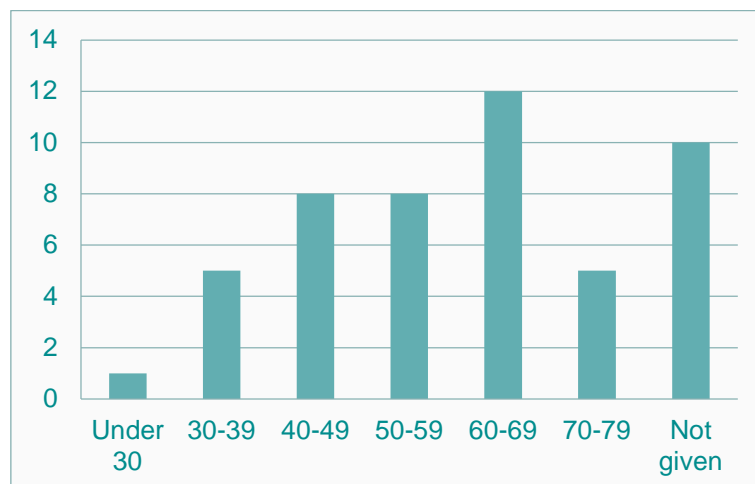
The aim was for a balance of different experiences and backgrounds, for example, by age, gender, ethnicity, disability and whether the contact with the PHSO was an enquiry or investigation.

After the four locations for the workshops had been decided, the database of 708 customers who had agreed to be contacted again for research purposes was divided according to geographical location. Due to the lower number of investigations in the database, an almost equal balance of enquirers and investigations were invited to each workshop. 41% of potential participants were invited by letter, and 58% by email.

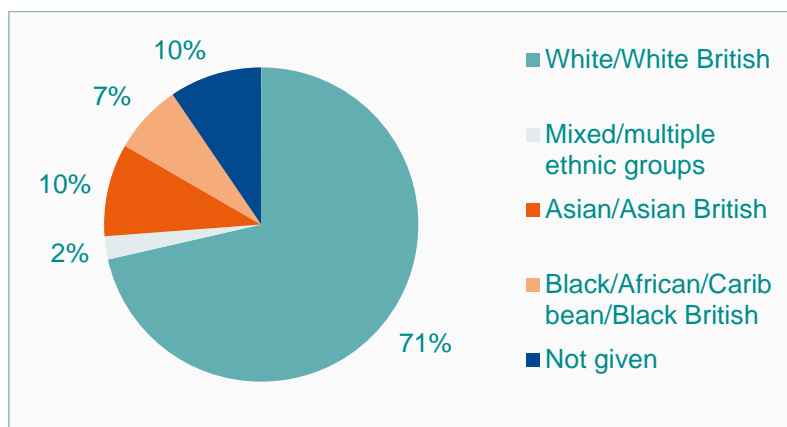
54 customers attended in total - which includes four carers/partners who attended to support others to participate, but also had in depth knowledge of the PHSO through that role.

Overall, most participants fell into the 60-69 age bracket. There was an even split of female and male participants.

Figure 1: Customer workshop participants by age



The ethnicity of participants was as follows (ethnicity was self-reported and then coded against the Office for National Statistics guideline categories):

Figure 2: Customer workshop participants by ethnicity

Engagement in the workshops

Attendance was lower at two of the workshops, and the balance of different experiences (positive and negative; investigations and enquiries) in the original sampling plan was difficult to achieve. However, there was a relatively small pool of potential participants and the research design could not accommodate a wider geographical spread which might have made it easier for more people to attend.

Participants at the workshops were asked to fill in feedback forms - 22 were completed, with further comments submitted via email afterwards. Everyone indicated that they either '*strongly agreed*' or '*tended to agree*' with the statement '*there was enough time for me to say everything I wanted*'. The only negative feedback on the forms was some concern over what would happen as a result of the service charter programme.

A small number of PHSO staff also attended, observed and/or participated in the workshops.

Workshop for organisations that the PHSO has the power to investigate

A workshop with 10 representatives from the Cross Government Complaints Forum was held on 6th March 2015 in London, and was promoted to all members of the Forum. This followed a similar format to the customer workshops, but with the customer journey exercise adapted to make it relevant to their roles. Organisations represented at the workshop were government departments and agencies of differing sizes:

- Environment Agency
- HMRC
- Department of Work and Pensions
- Valuation Office Agency
- Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency

- Legal Aid Agency
- HM Courts and Tribunal Services
- Valuation Office Agency
- Legal Aid Agency
- Natural England

Feedback stage

To analyse findings so far, to engage with further priority groups (the NHS community, staff at organisational levels within advocacy, consumer and representative groups; service users with specific health conditions and disabilities) and draft a service charter

Ongoing meetings and engagement

The Service Charter team at the PHSO attended other external meetings to talk about the project. These included: the NHS Complaints Managers Forum, the Cross Government Complaints Forum, the Complaints Handling, Investigating, Resolving and Learning Conference, a Medical Protection Society meeting, and a House of Commons open day.

Workshops

The PHSO organised three workshops with the NHS Complaints Managers Forum in June and July 2015.

The PHSO were involved with four workshops with service users organised by POhWER in September 2015.

Staff events

The draft service charter was shared on the PHSO's intranet and feedback was encouraged. In addition, there were also two all-staff events held in London and Manchester, which included workshop activities and feedback on the service charter.

Final stage surveys

Two surveys were designed by the PHSO's research team during the final feedback stage. These were hosted by OPM, who received and analysed the data directly. These were open between 25th November 2015 and 13th January 2016.

88 respondents completed the short general online survey. This asked respondents to rate overall how satisfied they were with the content of the charter, and provide feedback on its scope and whether or not it was easy to understand.

- 22% were current or previous customers of the PHSO
- 18% were advocacy or interest group representatives

- 10% worked for an organisation that the PHSO has the power to investigate
- 1% were members of staff at the PHSO – as outlined above, the draft charter was shared on the PHSO's intranet, and staff were encouraged to provide feedback directly, as well as complete the survey.
- The remainder of participants were not identifiable or chose not to disclose this information.

91 respondents completed the targeted survey. Alongside open comments, this survey presented each section of the draft service charter, asking for specific feedback.

- 32% worked for an organisation that the PHSO has the power to investigate
- 12% were current or previous customers of the PHSO
- The remainder of participants were not identifiable or chose not to disclose this information

Appendix 2: The draft service charter



What we do

We make final decisions on complaints that have not been resolved by the NHS in England and UK government departments and some UK public organisations.

You can complain to us if you believe there has been an injustice or hardship because an organisation has not acted properly or put things right.

Normally you should complain to the organisation first so it has a chance to put things right. When the organisation has replied, if you still think that they have not resolved your concerns, you can ask us to look at the complaint.

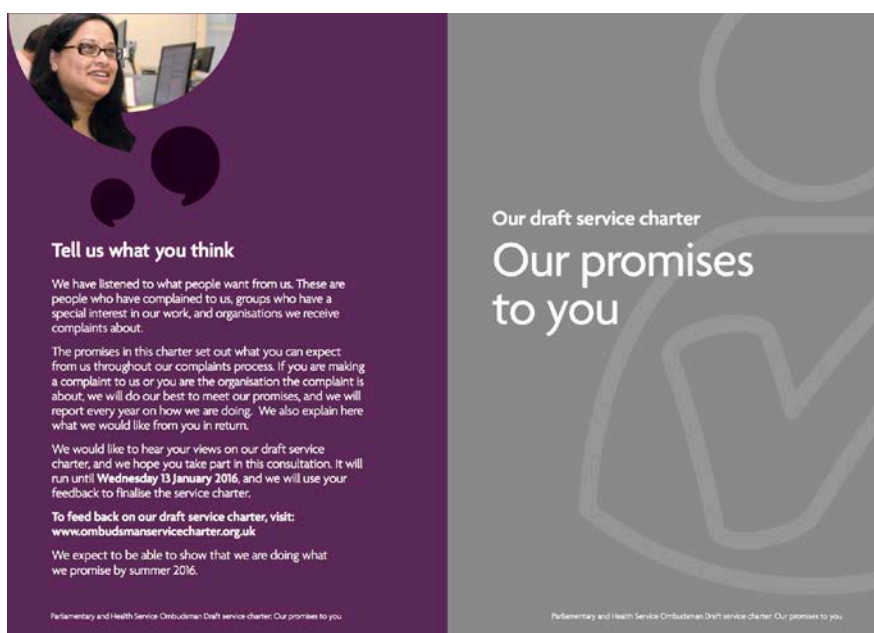
We are not part of Government or the NHS in England, and we are not a regulator. We are not a consumer champion or a mediator. Our service is impartial, independent and free for everyone.

When people bring their complaints to us, we consider them under a three-stage process:

Stage 1: We carry out some initial checks to see if the complaint is one we can look into, if it is not, we give people information on what they can do next.

Stage 2: We assess the complaint and decide if we should investigate it.

Stage 3: We make a final decision on the complaint following an investigation.



Tell us what you think

We have listened to what people want from us. These are people who have complained to us, groups who have a special interest in our work, and organisations we receive complaints about.

The promises in this charter set out what you can expect from us throughout our complaints process. If you are making a complaint to us or you are the organisation the complaint is about, we will do our best to meet our promises, and we will report every year on how we are doing. We also explain here what we would like from you in return.

We would like to hear your views on our draft service charter, and we hope you take part in this consultation. It will run until **Wednesday 13 January 2016**, and we will use your feedback to finalise the service charter.

To feedback on our draft charter, please fill in our survey.

We expect to be able to show that we are doing what we promise by summer 2016.

...try to resolve your complaint at the earliest possible stage.



When you contact our service

We will:

- clearly explain our role, how we handle complaints, what we can and cannot look at, and what information we need from you
- listen to you to make sure we understand your complaint
- advise you on what we can and cannot achieve with your complaint
- try to resolve your complaint at the earliest possible stage
- let you know as soon as we can if we are going to investigate your complaint. If we can't help with your complaint, where appropriate, we will direct you to someone who can

Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman Draft service charter: Our promises to you

When we carry out an investigation

We will:

- listen to what you want from us and check that we understand your complaint
- explain to you what we will be investigating and how we will carry out the investigation
- advise you on how long we think it may take, and what further information we need from you and others
- be open about what we are seeing during our investigation and, where we can, share facts, and emerging views
- consider all the evidence and information you and the organisation complained about give us
- give both you and the organisation complained about the opportunity to comment on our draft investigation report
- make decisions on complaints based on an objective look at the evidence we receive from all those involved in the complaint
- clearly explain our decisions and recommendations, how we reached them, and the information we used



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Our draft service charter: our promises to you

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Throughout our contact with you

We will:

- treat you with courtesy and respect
- work with you to understand your individual needs and make sure our service is easily accessible to you
- give you information in plain English or other languages and formats if you need this
- put you in touch, where possible, with any support you may need, such as an advocacy group
- carry out our work as quickly and thoroughly as possible bearing in mind the individual circumstances of your complaint
- keep you updated throughout our handling of your complaint
- give you the name of the person handling your complaint, so you can contact them directly by phone, email or letter
- make sure our record keeping is accurate, keep your information safe and share it appropriately



Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman Draft service charter: Our promises to you

Making a difference

We will:

- share the learning from our casework with Parliament, to help it scrutinise the organisations we investigate
- share this information widely with the organisations we investigate, regulators and others, to help improve public services
- promote and share good practice when we see it

Listening and learning to improve our service

We will:

- let you know who you can raise concerns with at any stage of the process
- acknowledge and apologise for any mistakes we make, and take action to put things right
- listen to your feedback and use what we have learned to improve our service
- regularly report on our performance and how we are doing against these promises on our website
- report to Parliament on how we are performing against this charter

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What we expect from people when they use our service

We need you to:

- complain to the organisation first so it has a chance to put things right
- treat our staff with courtesy and respect
- give us information in the timescales we have agreed with you to avoid unnecessary delays
- tell us if you have any particular needs that we should be aware of
- understand that we may not always be able to achieve what you are looking for
- appreciate that we will manage the investigation in a way that is fair to all those involved in the complaint, deciding what questions and evidence is relevant to the complaint



Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman Draft service charter: Our promises to you

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What we expect from organisations complained about

We need you to:

- give the complainant a clear final answer to their complaint
- make people aware of our service when you send them a final response to their complaint
- treat our staff and complainants with courtesy and respect
- work with us to address the complaint as quickly and effectively as possible
- give us all the information we ask for in a timely way
- show the complainant and us how you have acted on our recommendations

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