

MOD FORMAL RESPONSE

Service Complaints Ombudsman's Annual Report 2024

Ministry of Defence Response to the Report

Thank you for your Annual Report for 2024 which assesses the efficiency, effectiveness and fairness of the Service Complaints system.

I am pleased your report recognises another year of significant progress and that the Services and the Ministry of Defence have shown a real commitment to delivering on outstanding recommendations, and to improving the experience for users of the Service Complaints system.

I am encouraged that you have recognised the considerable effort from the Services who play an active part in designing solutions and making changes, and an increased commitment by the Ministry of Defence to deliver improvements.

While I understand you remain unable to say that the Service Complaints system is efficient, effective, and fair, I am pleased that you recognise that the system is very close to being considered fair and that there have been improvements in the effectiveness of the system, most notably around flexibility and proportionality.

With regard to the improvements that have been made, it is particularly pleasing to note your acknowledgement of the introduction of the 'MyComplaint app' which has improved accessibility of the system and allows individuals to submit and track their complaint online.

Furthermore, the delivery of a Service Complaint Quality Assurance process for reviewing the handling and outcomes of cases which do not form part of your usual casework, like you, we believe that this transparency provides an additional layer of oversight which gives our Service People confidence that there are checks, balances and quality review measures in place throughout the process.

The work associated with the five outstanding recommendations is progressing well, and we will continue to work with you and your team as we progress these and provide you with formal updates as required.

I look forward to continuing to work with you to see how the changes that have already been made and those that we are making to the system take effect, and building on your excellent work as we establish the new Armed Forces Commissioner.

In your report you have made two new recommendations. We have carefully considered these and responses to each are provided below:

Recommendation 9.1 – that the Ministry of Defence agrees to adopt a suite of supplementary KPIs, designed by SCOAF, to provide a more comprehensive overview of measurable performance metrics within the system. The overarching timeliness KPI is to remain in place. However, the supplementary KPIs are to be designed and owned by SCOAF, in collaboration and

discussion with the Ministry of Defence and the Services. To be completed by January 2026.

Presently, the sole KPI explains that 90% of all Service Complaints, regardless of subject matter, should be resolved within 24 weeks. While this KPI assures Service People that they should have their complaint resolved within a set timescale, it does not take into account the nature of the complaint, nor the complexity of it. I will ask my team and the single Service's to work with you in order to agree a suite of KPI's which may better reflect the range and complexity of all Service Complaints made.

Recommendation 9.2 – that the Ministry of Defence works with SCOAF and the Services to develop an agreed, formal process for dealing with mass complaints, to include guidance as to what constitutes a mass complaint, and the situations in which deviation from existing Service Complaint policy is anticipated. To be completed by January 2026.

We agree that as with any large organisation, there is always the risk that a mass complaint may occur. Mass complaints by their nature can place a sudden and high demand on our internal complaints system and may cause your office to see an increase in requests for assistance and/or investigation. It is right that a process is devised to address events such as this, and this will be achieved by drawing on our previous experience of similar incidents and through collaboration with your office.

I want to place on record my thanks to you for the work that you have driven forward during your tenure as the Service Complaints Ombudsman, and I know that the changes you have suggested have helped us improve the system for our members of the Armed Forces, as we ourselves commit to renew the nations contract with those who serve.