

1969 – 2019

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You will remember that when we met before Christmas you gave me a letter about a resolution passed by the Cambridge University Liberal Club protesting against "social injustice, religious discrimination, etc., in Northern Ireland" and calling on the Government to initiate legislation for the setting up of an Ombudsman for Ulster and an Electoral Commission to review electoral boundaries in Northern Ireland.

You might be interested to have a look at the enclosed copy of a speech which I made last month in the debate on the address. You will see from this that we are, in fact, setting up a Boundary Commission. As far as the appointment of an Ombudsman is concerned, this is a question which under our devolutionary powers is one to be decided by the Government and Parliament of Northern Ireland. To this point we have not seen any justification for such an appointment here. The smaller scale of affairs is such that problems can be raised by Members of Parliament

PRESSURE MOUNTS TO HAVE ULSTER OMBUDSMAN

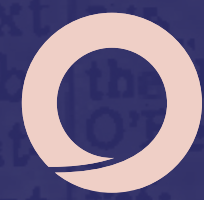
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Jan 22/11/69

... carried out with Mr. James ...

- ... on behalf of the Government of
- (2) Investigation of citizens' grievances: Consideration will be given to the need for effective machinery to investigate such grievances in an objective way, and in the area of Central Government activity there will be legislation to appoint a Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration ("Ombudsman").
 - (3) Implementation of Londonderry Area Plan: As already announced, the Government will take all possible steps to ensure that prompt and effective action is taken to implement a Plan, which will transform the economic and social conditions of life in the City. They are prepared to assist by the appointment of a strong, well-qualified and objective Development Commission with full powers to carry out, as provided for in the New Town Act, 1965, all the necessary work of planning, ... and physical development.



Northern Ireland
Public Services
 Ombudsman

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‘WE LOOK AT
COMPLAINTS MADE BY
INDIVIDUAL CITIZENS
WHO FEEL THEY HAVE
BEEN **POORLY TREATED**
BY PUBLIC BODIES.’

Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman



Our History

The first use of the term Ombudsman was in Sweden in 1809. It is an old Norse word, meaning officer or commissioner.

An Ombudsman looks at complaints made by individuals who feel they have been poorly treated by an organisation.

The first country to have an Ombudsman in the modern sense was Denmark which established an office in 1954.

In 1969 the government of Northern Ireland introduced a reform package as a response to increasing levels of social unrest.

The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints opened its doors on 22 December 1969. It received complaints about matters relating to local government and other public bodies, including in the areas of housing, employment and planning. At the time there were only ten similar offices elsewhere in the world.

It joined the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration (PCA) which investigated grievances about central government. Together, the PCA and the Commissioner for Complaints were referred to as 'the Ombudsman'.

In 2016 the organisation officially became the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman. The legislation governing the Ombudsman was modernised and the Office's remit extended to cover a wider range of public services. It also became the first Ombudsman in the United Kingdom to be provided with own initiative powers to launch systemic investigations.



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PRESSURE MOUNTS TO HAVE ULSTER OMBUDSMAN

THE HOME SECRETARY, Mr. Roy Jenkins, has agreed to meet a deputation of Labour M.P.s to discuss, following talks between Mr. Harold Wilson and

Captain O'Neill, Northern Ireland affairs and the constitutional convention governing the discussion of Ulster topics at Westminster.

Mention will be made at the meeting next Wednesday of the substantial support, amounting to 100 signatures at the moment, gathered for the motion tabled by Mr. Gerry Fitt, Republican Labour M.P. for West Belfast, urging the extension of the Ombudsman's

Lib.. Queen's, who carried out the lobbying with Mr. James O'Reilly, Nat.. Mourne, and Mr. John Brennan, National Democrat, Belfast Central, said one of the deputation's objectives was to break down the convention that in no circumstances could Westminster legislate for Northern Ireland.

The following statement has been issued on behalf of the Government of Northern Ireland:-

The continued agitation and unrest in Northern Ireland, and particularly in Londonderry, has been a matter of great concern to the Government. It is clear that unless the situation is stabilised and political action is restored to constitutional channels, there is a grave risk of still more serious disorders and of a tragic setback to our hopes of further social and economic progress.

It is our belief that in the last few weeks the great achievements of recent years have been belittled and the attitude of the Government of Northern Ireland has frequently been misrepresented. In particular the Government repudiates any suggestion that the location of new industries or other major capital projects has been influenced in any way by political or sectarian considerations. We affirm once again that in the making of appointments within our control, merit has been, and will continue to be, the only relevant yardstick.

NIPSO

“THE NOTION OF CREATING A FORMAL COMPLAINTS STRUCTURE RAN COUNTER TO THE WAY GOVERNMENT HAD OPERATED FOR 50 YEARS.”

— DR PAUL ARTHUR

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Dr Paul Arthur

Honorary Professor of Peace Studies, Ulster University

Interview



Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman

...
Investigation of citizens' grievances: Consideration will be given to need for effective machinery to investigate such grievances in an effective way, and in the area of Central Government activity there will be legislation to appoint a Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration (Ombudsman").
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Local government franchise: We are concerned at the widespread misunderstanding and confusion which exists on this issue. It is not generally appreciated that in any event the triennial local government elections will not be held again until April, 1970. It is our intention to carry out a comprehensive reform and modernisation of the local government

"In Northern Ireland in the late 1950s and 1960s a number of injustices were seen as needing addressed. These included the unfair allocation of houses, discrimination in employment, and problems with local elections.

There were various forms of protest, from formal pressure groups to the rise of more direct action, and things came to a head in 1968 with the civil rights movement.

This cannot be seen purely as a catholic phenomenon, because there were also voices inside liberal unionism who recognised that things had to change.

When Terence O'Neill became Prime Minister in 1963 he set out with a modernising agenda. He was very familiar with the reforms going on in Whitehall and decided that Northern Ireland needed to move in the same direction.

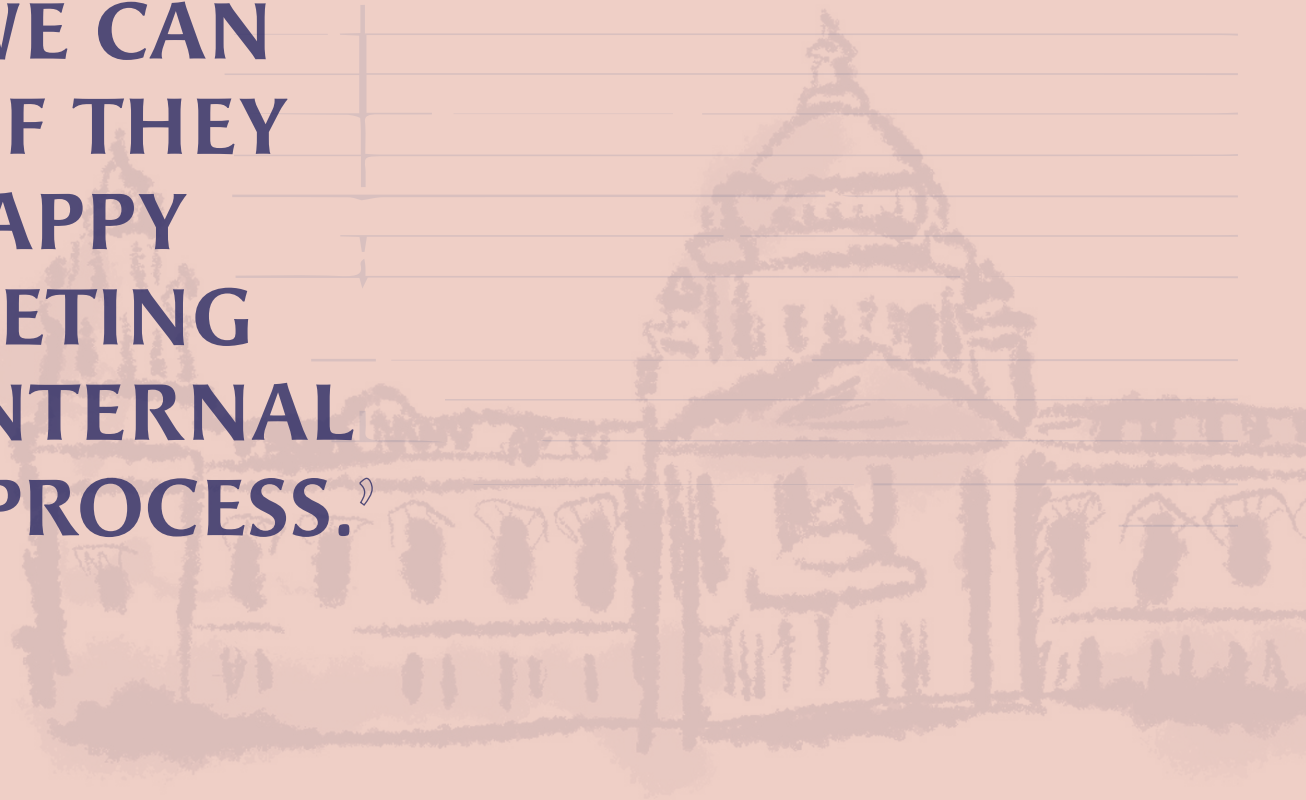
A group inside the Labour party in Britain also slowly began to put pressure on Prime Minister Harold Wilson, who in turn began to put pressure on O'Neill.

At the time, the method of resolving people's problems was very informal. Stormont was referred to as a 'factory of grievances' – members of the public took their complaints to their local MP, in the hope of getting the problem sorted out. The notion of creating a formal complaints structure ran counter to the way government had operated for 50 years.

Eventually, O'Neill realised that something needed to be done, and following a meeting in London in November 1968 he came back and announced that there were to be a series of reforms, including the creation of an Ombudsman.

Although the term 'Ombudsman' was much too foreign for most people, once it became established, the principle of having individual grievances investigated in an independent and objective way became very important."

‘COMPLAINANTS
MUST GO TO THE
RELEVANT PUBLIC
BODY FIRST. **WE CAN
INVESTIGATE IF THEY
REMAIN UNHAPPY
AFTER COMPLETING
THE BODY’S INTERNAL
COMPLAINTS PROCESS.**’



Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman

What we do

The Ombudsman investigates complaints against a range of public bodies, including:

Government Departments and agencies

Health care providers (for example about the care and treatment of patients in hospitals, dental practices, opticians, and GP surgeries)

Providers of social care (for example about the care and treatment of patients in nursing homes and residential care homes, plus those receiving care at home)

Local councils

Providers of social housing

Schools, colleges and universities.

‘WE AIM FOR SOLUTIONS & REMEDIES THAT ARE FAIR.’

Parliamentary Commissioner
for Administration
Commissioner for Complaints

ANNUAL REPORT OF
THE OMBUDSMAN
FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

1994

1998/99 Annual Report

Parliamentary Commissioner
for Administration
Commissioner for Complaints

1989



CECIL R. CLOWRIE
Parliamentary Commissioner for
Administration and Commissioner for
Complaints
1 February 1989 to 30 June 1990

Parliamentary Commissioner
for Administration
Commissioner for Complaints



NORTHERN IRELAND
COMMISSIONER
FOR COMPLAINTS

‘IN AN INVESTIGATION
WE DO NOT TAKE SIDES,
BUT ARE ABLE TO ASK
QUESTIONS ON BEHALF
OF COMPLAINANTS.’



JOHN H. REID
Parliamentary Commissioner for Complaints
22 December 2000 to 21 December 2001



Dr Gerry Thomas WDFE
Northern Ireland Assembly Ombudsman
and Northern Ireland Commissioner
for Complaints
1 February 2000 to 31 August 2003

ANNUAL REPORT OF
THE OMBUDSMAN
NORTHERN IRELAND

1993



EDMUND GRIFFIN
Parliamentary Commissioner for
Administration
July 1985 to 31 December 1989



of the Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland
and the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints

Paul McFadden

Deputy Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman

Interview

“An Ombudsman investigates complaints where people believe they have been treated unfairly or have received poor service from a public body. This might be by a local council or government department or in relation to education, housing or health and social care; for example a GP, hospital or care home.

It is a free and independent service which can help find solutions to problems without involving the courts.

Our investigations look in great detail at the issues in a complaint. We ask questions, gather and assess information to find out what happened and independently reach our findings.

Where we find things have gone wrong we make recommendations to put things right for complainants or their families. We try to resolve things, especially where there is an ongoing relationship between the citizen and the public body. Often an apology is the most important part of this.

We also help public bodies learn from complaints - to be responsive to concerns and improve public services. Our key aim is to help ensure failures don't happen again in future.

We have now had an Ombudsman in Northern Ireland for 50 years - since 1969 we have investigated complaints from around 35,000 members of the public and continue to respond to thousands of people each year across our public services.”

‘WE CAN HELP
EVERYONE FIND THE
BEST SOLUTION
TO PROBLEMS ...

...WITHOUT GOING
TO THE COURTS.’

Mrs Vivien Jess

Complainant

Case Study

Mr and Mrs Jess's daughter was admitted to hospital one evening with an existing medical condition. Sadly she died early the following morning.

An Ombudsman investigation found major failures in the care she was given, most notably the unreasonable responsibility placed on Mr Jess to look after his daughter during the night.

The report said that regular checks by nursing staff would have identified a deterioration in her condition earlier. This may have allowed Mrs Jess to be alerted for her to arrive at the hospital in time to support her daughter in her final moments.

The Ombudsman recommended that senior representatives from the Health Trust meet with Mr and Mrs Jess to apologise to them in person for the injustices they had suffered, and that the Trust provide them with an overview of the number of improvements that had been made within the hospital as a result of their complaint.

“WHEN WE FIRST WENT INTO
THE OMBUDSMAN'S OFFICE
THE FIRST THING THAT
STRUCK ME WAS THAT..



Interview

...THEY WERE ACTUALLY LISTENING TO WHAT WE WERE SAYING”

– MRS VIVEN JESS

“At the end of the hospital’s own complaints process we got a sort of apology, but we felt that they didn’t recognise a lot of what had gone wrong. I don’t think unless you recognise what has gone wrong you can begin to change it.

When we first went into the Ombudsman’s office the first thing that struck me was that they were actually listening to what we were saying.

They took on board our concerns, and that felt like a great relief. They didn’t make any promises, but they said they would have an independent review of the circumstances, and that’s all we wanted.

When the report was produced we met with the investigators who took us through the findings and recommendations. The Health Trust were asked to give a full face-to-face apology and acknowledge what had gone wrong. They were also told to make a number of changes to their procedures.

I went down on a visit to the hospital and I was able to see for myself what changes had been made, and that reassured me that the Ombudsman had teeth if you like, that they were able to recommend things and the hospital was able to take it on board and things would change.

Before we went to the Ombudsman, we were absolutely at the end of the line, and emotionally I don’t think we could have coped with going down the legal route. What we were looking for was somebody independent of it all saying ‘this is what happened’ and that’s what we found with the Ombudsman.”



Mrs Anne Martin

Complainant

Case Study

Mrs Martin complained about the nutritional care given to her mother by a hospital during the last weeks of her life.

At the beginning of her stay she was given soft foods to eat, but was soon moved onto just thickened liquids by her medical team. Her intake declined over the following weeks, and she lost over a stone in weight in just one month.

On five different occasions the dietitians who were looking after her said that she was not getting sufficient nutrition, and that she should be fed artificially. However, the medical team did not attempt artificial feeding until 16 days after the first recommendation.

The Ombudsman concluded that because of her frail health earlier intervention may not have prevented her death, but it may have alleviated her discomfort and distress in the last weeks of her life.



Interview

“WHEN I GOT THE REPORT.. IT BROUGHT ME SOME PEACE.”

— MRS ANNE MARTIN



“When my Mum died the whole family was devastated. We were determined to make sure what happened to her in hospital should not happen to anyone else.

I went to the Ombudsman because I was very frustrated at the response I was getting from the Health Trust. I wanted somebody who was independent of the case to look at the medical notes fairly and impartially and find out what really happened.

When I got a letter from them to say that they were going to investigate my complaint I felt a lot of pressure had been taken off me.

They went to great lengths to chase up records and used three independent advisors to assess all the documents.

The report I received back was pretty meticulous, and it took a long time to absorb because they had so much information in it, but I felt relieved. I felt that I had got part of my life back and it brought me some peace. It didn't bring my mother back but it brought me some peace.”





“TO HELP US FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENED, PUBLIC BODIES MUST SUPPLY US WITH THE **RELEVANT DOCUMENTS.** IF NECESSARY, WE CAN **COMPEL OFFICIALS TO GIVE EVIDENCE.**”



David Sterling

Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service

Interview

“We work very hard in the civil service to provide high quality public services, but it is important to acknowledge that sometimes things go wrong. When they do, I think it’s very important that we need to have complaints dealt with as close to the source as possible, and that means we need good complaints systems within departments.

Equally, if things can’t be resolved there’s a very important role for the Ombudsman in stepping in and reassuring people that their complaints will be dealt with thoroughly and quickly.

“IF THINGS CAN’T BE RESOLVED THERE’S A **VERY** IMPORTANT ROLE FOR THE OMBUDSMAN.”

– DAVID STERLING

It’s also really important that we look to see whether there are any lessons to be learnt about the way in which a service has been provided, so that we can actually fix the thing that went wrong. This is to make sure that services improve for anybody using that service in the future.

We need to be as responsive as possible to the needs of members of the public, and I think we have worked really well with the Ombudsman in this area.”



‘EVERYONE CAN **LEARN LESSONS**
FROM OUR DECISIONS..TO
PREVENT MISTAKES FROM
HAPPENING AGAIN.’

‘**OUR DECISIONS** BRING
COMPLAINTS TO A CLOSE, GIVING
COMPLAINANTS AND PUBLIC
BODIES AN **AUTHORITATIVE**
OUTCOME TO DISPUTES.’





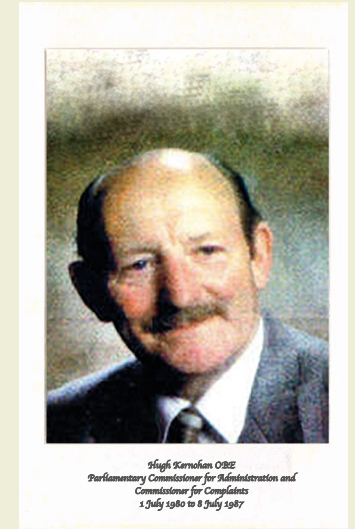
‘WE PROVIDE A **SAFE AND NEUTRAL** SPACE TO TRY AND RESOLVE DISPUTES IN A **NON-ADVERSARIAL** WAY.’



‘WE MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS TO **PUT THINGS RIGHT** FOR COMPLAINANTS.’

1969 – 2019
50

a timeline of former Ombudsmen



Sir Edmund Compton

John M Benn

Stephen McGonagle

Cecil M Clothier

Hugh Kernohan OBE

1969 - 1971

1972 - 1973

1974 - 1979

1980

1980 - 1987

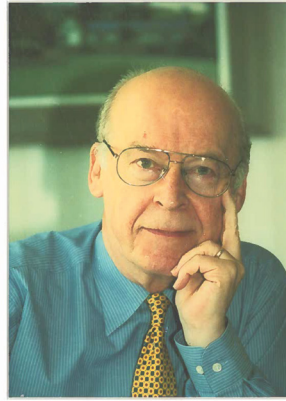
‘WE HAVE HELPED OVER 35,000 PEOPLE SINCE WE OPENED IN DECEMBER 1969.’



Dr Maurice Hayes
Northern Ireland Parliamentary
Commissioner for Administration and
Northern Ireland Commissioner for
Complaints
9 July 1967 – 31 January 1991



Mrs Jill McIvor CBE QSM
Northern Ireland Parliamentary
Commissioner for Administration and
Northern Ireland Commissioner for
Complaints
1 February 1991 – 31 January 1996



Dr Gerry Burns MBE
Northern Ireland Assembly Ombudsman
and Northern Ireland Commissioner
for Complaints
1 February 1996 – 31 August 2000



Dr Tom Frawley CBE
Northern Ireland Assembly Ombudsman
and Northern Ireland Commissioner
for Complaints
1 September 2000 to 31 March 2016



Marie Anderson
Northern Ireland
Public Services Ombudsman,
1 April 2016 – 15 July 2019

Dr Maurice Hayes

Mrs Jill McIvor CBE QSM

Gerry Burns MBE

Dr Tom Frawley CBE

Marie Anderson

1987 - 1991

1991 - 1996

1996 - 2000

2000 - 2016

2016 - 2019

