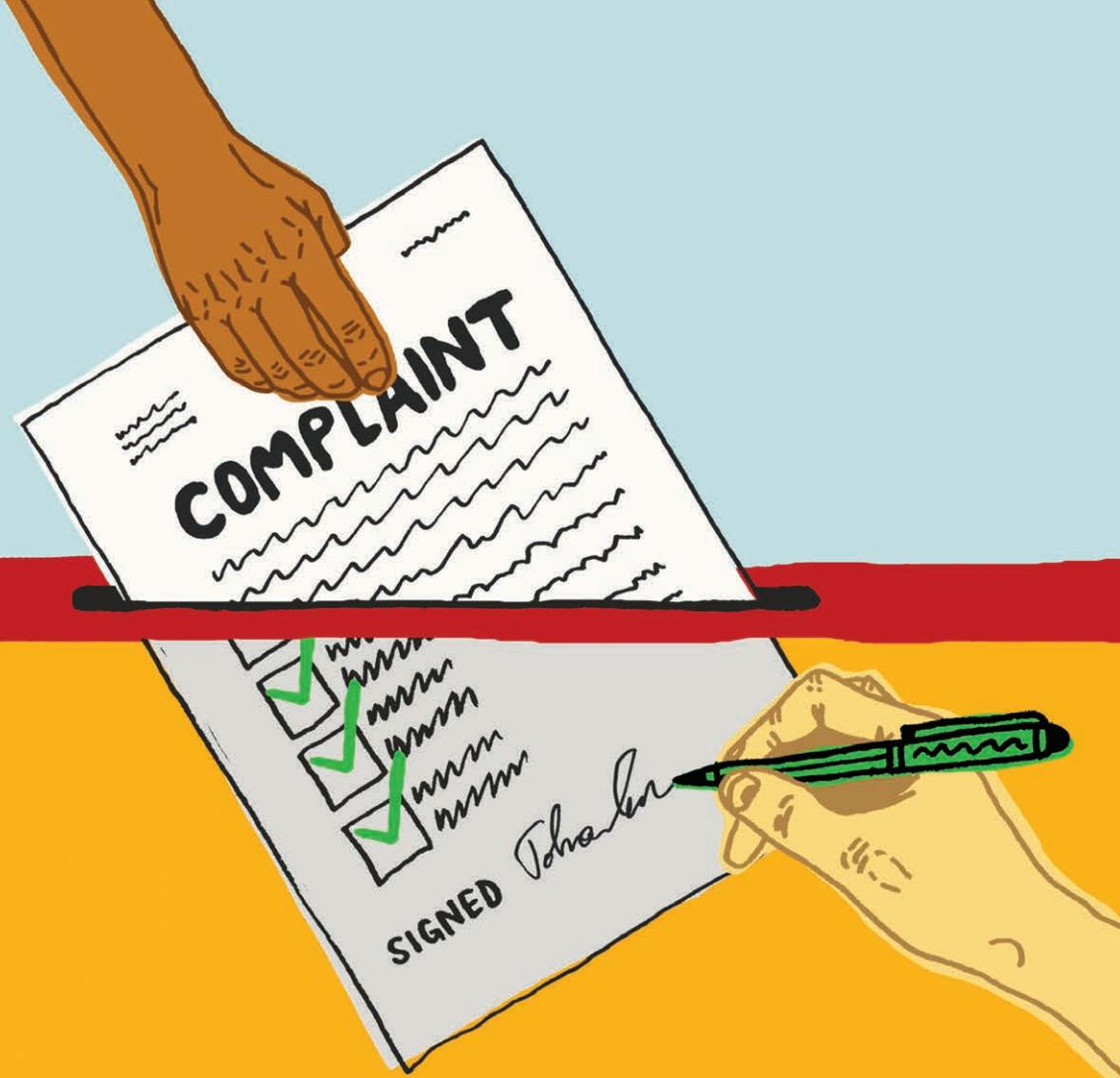


**MAKE
COMPLAINTS
COUNT**



Which?

Public services are vital to millions of people across the UK, yet too often people feel unable to raise concerns or complain when services are not up to scratch. When things go wrong it is important that people know they will be listened to, and that their feedback will be taken into account to improve services and ensure problems do not recur.

However, across public services people report feeling ignored, victimised, or discouraged from complaining, which tells us that the complaints system isn't currently fit for purpose. We calculate that at least 5.3 million people in the UK who have had a problem in the last year did not go on to make an official complaint.

A year ago Which? launched a campaign calling on the Government to make complaints count in public services.

Over **60,000** people have signed up to support the campaign, with nearly **14,000** people submitting their comments and stories.

This paper includes their feedback, along with evidence on the scale of the problem, based on the findings of our research since 2012. It also sets out our recommendations for change to ensure that complaints count.



What we are calling for

The Government needs to rebuild trust in public services following years of scandal and failings, particularly in health and social care. People should be empowered and supported to make a complaint when things go wrong, and action should be taken as a result of their complaint.

Which? is calling on the Government to make complaints count by:

- 1 Requiring all regulators of public services to use complaints to trigger inspections
- 2 Giving people access to independent support to help them complain
- 3 Introducing a single public services ombudsman to deal with complaints effectively
- 4 Allowing representative groups to make super-complaints on behalf of those impacted
- 5 Ensuring whistleblowers are listened to and their concerns are acted upon

To ensure these reforms have impact in the next Parliament, the Government should introduce the following in its first session:

- Legislation in the Queen's Speech to set up a single public services ombudsman, expand a duty of candour across all public services, reform advocacy and support services, establish super-complaint powers in public services, and create a link between complaints and regulatory inspections.
- A single portal for public service complaints.
- A requirement across all public service providers to support and protect whistleblowers.

“If people do not complain when things go wrong, nothing will change. Each person should be heard – most complaints seem to be ignored as not enough people voice their opinions, because nothing changes when one does complain.”

KAREN, LONDON

“Our public services are, at their best, an excellent way of ensuring that all members of society are properly cared for according to their needs. When the service falls short of our expectations, a complaint is our way of initiating an investigation, which should lead to more consistency in high standards of service... Human error and system failure do cause problems and when this happens it should not be overlooked or dismissed.”

CAROLYN, NORTH EAST

“I am one of those people who have felt the need to complain, but have not bothered as I didn't think it was worth it. That's not right and it needs to change.”

TRACEY, EAST OF ENGLAND



**PEOPLE'S
EXPERIENCES**

Stories and comments submitted to Which?

Since the launch of our campaign to make complaints count a year ago Which? has received compelling stories of people's experiences of making complaints. They divide into two groups: people who experienced a grievance but decided not to make a complaint; and those who have made a complaint and have experience of the current system.

This report includes findings from:

- Review and analysis in February 2015 of the feedback from 13,897 comments from supporters of Which?'s Make Complaints Count campaign.
- 22 in-depth telephone interviews with a sample of those who submitted stories to the campaign, carried out in August 2014.

Statistical research

The evidence provided by people's stories is also supported and reinforced by findings from statistically representative surveys and analysis.

This report includes findings from:

- An online survey of 4,058 UK adults, conducted by Populus on behalf of Which?, between 6 - 12 February 2015.
- Which?'s Consumer Insight Tracker (a survey of 2,000 UK adults collected monthly since 2012).

Our supporters' experience of the complaints system

Which?'s previous investigations into public services have highlighted stark variations in the quality of higher education institutions, social care providers and primary health services, such as GPs and dentistry.

Through the Make Complaints Count campaign people have told us that it was hard to complain, or to do so confidently and effectively especially in a pressured situation, where the complaints system is difficult to navigate.

The volume and depth of the stories we received from our supporters demonstrated people's wide ranging concerns. This included some harrowing and disturbing accounts of their own personal experience of public services, and the problems with the complaints system they experienced when things went wrong for them.

Reading across the stories, we have found some common themes:

- Complexity
- Lack of support
- Insufficient time to complain
- Feeling vulnerable and victimised
- Lack of action
- Vested interests
- Whistleblowing

“The general public should know that when legitimate issues are raised, they will be effectively and transparently investigated and corrected, if appropriate, to the standard we are entitled to expect. There are too many people afraid to complain in case they, their relatives or friends will be penalised for speaking out.”

SUE, EAST OF ENGLAND

1 Complexity

The stories from our campaign supporters show that people are finding significant barriers to coming forward with problems when they arise.

Due to the complexity of the complaints system we have seen that people can find themselves lost in a maze of organisations and processes, not knowing who they can take a complaint to or how to get a resolution to their issue.

“I work in the NHS and I have also experienced care issues where I have had to raise complaints. It was only my inside knowledge and contacts that allowed me to progress but not to even conclude my complaints.”

DEBBIE, LONDON

“We have had too many incidents of poor care but haven't complained because of both the complexity and the protective wall that surrounds the system.”

TERRY, SOUTH EAST

“My brother-in-law died due to incompetence in hospital. The complaints system was stacked against his widow, my sister, and she eventually abandoned her complaint because of the difficulties she faced.”

RICHARD, WEST MIDLANDS

“I have recently complained about a problem with Mental Health Services and found it helpful and effective, but the process needs to be simplified for those who, unlike myself, have never worked in a public service. The new NHS complaints process is murky and opaque. It must be improved.”

URSULA, EAST MIDLANDS

2 Lack of support

People raised their concerns about the lack of support for those who need help raising a complaint.

They also raised concerns about the effectiveness of the current support services available in health.

“Vulnerable people in hospital can feel they have no voice if their care isn't as it should be, it is important that others can complain on their behalf.”

PAM, NORTH EAST

“At present we are on our own against a large concern with highly paid legal back up. We need a strong voice to speak on our behalf should we need to make a complaint.”

HARVEY, SOUTH EAST

“Having had to complain I know how difficult it is and what happens to the people who have no one to complain on their behalf!”

EDWARD, SOUTH EAST

“The NHS has failed me and my family over and over again. Doctors seem to have impunity and yet can be responsible for the wrecking of health and lives. I would like to see, not only the taking of complaints seriously, but also help and support (legal if necessary) to make a complaint in the first place. It is invariably the time when people feel most vulnerable and often unable to stand up for themselves.”

SYLVIA, NORTH WEST

“At the time, I was too ill to complain. Many people don't have anyone to make a complaint for them.”

DAVID, EAST MIDLANDS

“From my dealings with PALS on two occasions, I've found them to be very weak... I found them to be powerless.”

ALAN, ENGLAND

“I spent 18 years of my NHS career assisting people to get through the complaints system the local independent support system was removed by the government in 2003 in favour of a more remote service. This is in my view unacceptable. As a user of the NHS now I am currently going through the complaints process concerning the care of a relative fortunately I know where to start but it is still a minefield.”

NIGEL, NORTH WEST

“I lost my first born son due to a complicated birth but did not make a complaint due to grief and ignorance, and nobody to advise us. There should be a better way than to sweep it under the carpet.”

PETER, SOUTH WEST

3 Insufficient time to complain

Many people felt unable to complain while sick or still involved with the service they wished to raise a complaint about.

In other cases, mistakes in treatment or service might not become apparent until significantly later.

The process can be dragged out, or they could be ignored. At this point many said they had been told it's 'too late' and they could not get redress.

“Having been caught up with poor care, then put off, by the time I knew I had a problem my complaint was 'too late' for any action to be taken on it.”

BRIAN, WEST MIDLANDS

“I had reason to complain about my treatment at a NHS hospital but was told I had complained too late for any action to be taken. It is now almost four years since my minor operation on my foot but I still cannot walk without pain.”

CHRISTINE, NORTH WEST

“I was very unhappy with the care my husband received but found it too time consuming and distressing to complain. He had terminal cancer and could not complain himself, and I was told I could not complain because the patient concerned was still alive.”

BRIGITTE, YORKSHIRE AND THE HUMBER

“When people experience problems with public services – especially health care services – it is often at a very stressful and busy time, when they are totally focused on resolving an urgent and distressing problem for themselves or a loved one. They will be easily dissuaded from complaining after the event when it is too late to help their situation. However, their voice needs to be heard to help spare others the same difficulties.”

ANNE, EAST OF ENGLAND

4 Feeling vulnerable and victimised

People told us of their fear of worse treatment as a result of complaining. There were many who felt that complaining would prejudice their treatment or case (e.g. they would be labelled the 'difficult patient') or they were at risk of being struck off or blacklisted from accessing the public service (e.g. GP surgeries).

This feeling was especially pronounced in health and social care, where people may be severely physically or mentally unwell. They fear that complaining will exacerbate their condition. They did not want to 'rock the boat'.

"I have had cause to complain in the past - but have been held back because I was told it would effect the quality of care given to my relation whilst in hospital. I felt powerless to expose dreadful care."

SARA, EAST OF ENGLAND

"I have experienced unsatisfactory care; so has one of my friends. When it happens you don't complain because, at the time, you are too ill to cope with the issue of complaining. If you are elderly and alone it is particularly difficult to deal with problems that really require a complaint to be made."

HEATHER, NORTH WEST

"Having experience of complaining on my husband's behalf in relation to NHS care, I know how stressful and challenging it can be, even when, as in our case, it was reasonably successful. Vulnerable people generally do not have the energy or resources to make their voices heard, let alone acted upon. This is simply not good enough in a modern society."

MICHELLE, YORKSHIRE AND THE HUMBER

"I feel that my GP has treated me badly and I feel that I have no mechanism for making a complaint without the feeling that I would be asking to be blacklisted in some way."

ROBERT, NORTH WEST

"I am afraid to complain about my care. Whenever I have done, my care has become much, much worse."

SOPHIA, SOUTH EAST

"I am aware of someone who is frightened of complaining about their GP practice because of a fear of being blacklisted and removed from the practice register. They have been told there is no right of appeal against such a decision."

MARIE, NORTH WEST

"I too made a complaint about my GP. Both me and my family got struck off with my father suffering from cancer at the time, which I feel was disgusting."

LINDA, WEST MIDLANDS

"I have experienced brilliant healthcare that I could never repay through my taxes but I have also experienced very poor care. It is very hard to complain when you are so vulnerable."

KES, LONDON

Case study

Jackie was so distressed by the care her dad received in hospital, and the neglect of other patients that she considered making a complaint. She said her father, who had broken his back, wasn't properly washed or fed even though he couldn't move.

Jackie told us:

"You tell a member of staff about it and they're really off-hand with you because you've dared to complain. I said to my daughter, 'we need to be really strong and complain about this', but my daughter said 'If we do, they'll be treating Granddad badly when we're not looking'."

Jackie wasn't advised how to complain, despite raising problems with staff, which fell on deaf ears. She said she was more likely to complain if she knew it was going to get her somewhere.

5 Lack of action

We found that many people want to complain to ensure that others never have to go through what they have. As such they feel unsatisfied if they don't see any evidence of how the system changes to prevent future problems.

They are highly sceptical that their complaint will have an impact and they don't think anything will be done to improve the situation for others.

“Complaints should be heard and if required action taken. Health and Social Care have a machine to reject complaints instead of a machine to listen and take action. My dad died because he was chucked out of the main hospital to an unsuitable hospital just before Christmas without the equipment he needed. He died. People listened to my complaint but took no action. Nothing has changed the same thing will continue to happen.”

PAUL, WEST MIDLANDS

“I have personal experience of the difficulties involved in making a complaint. I wouldn't have been able to change the outcome but would have liked to have been 'heard' and apologised to and feel that things like that would be less likely to happen to someone else because I had drawn attention to the situation.”

JANE, SOUTH EAST

“We've raised concerns about our parents' experiences in hospital, and whilst staff have listened sympathetically, we have had no confidence that any real action resulted.”

ILA, SOUTH EAST

“Like any business, they need to be held responsible. The same complaint can be made by many people but no one seems to collate this.”

DONNA, NORTH WEST

Case study

When baby Theo Hibbert tragically died, his family complained. They wanted the reasons for his death to be identified, lessons learned and changes made to prevent something similar happening again.

Theo's grandfather, Michael Cole, told us:

“Theo's hospital birth was classed as low risk. During labour he got stuck, as many first babies do, and tragically died of a cardiac arrest due to foetal distress. The hospital admitted organisational failings had contributed to the incident and took steps to change things locally. However, because professional standards had been broken, the case was referred to the regulators for proper investigation.

“Two years on, we have become increasingly frustrated by a complicated complaints system that has closed the case with serious concerns unresolved and our fear that something similar could still happen at other hospitals.

“Complaints are important and should be encouraged, investigated openly and fairly and the outcome acted upon.”

KEVIN, WEST MIDLANDS

“Investigating bodies point fingers at each other over who should be responsible for finding all the root causes of Theo's death. Many of the investigation reports were incorrect, incomplete and avoided the inclusion of evidence from Theo's parents, Rebecca and William. Communication has been appalling. It made us feel they did not want Theo's family involved at all. Even our Member of Parliament has found it hard to get answers.

“No family should have to go through this. The public needs a complaints system that treats patients with respect and that puts the protection of the public as the top priority. The current system needs a radical overhaul. That's why we support Which? in their Make Complaints Count campaign.”

6 Vested interests

People raised the perception that public services 'close ranks' and protect the professional rather than try to resolve the complaint. They think there is a vested interest in protecting the staff and maintaining the image of the service or organisation.

A common theme that came through was that people felt their complaint was met with denial, or it was belittled.

“There are far too many instances of things having gone badly wrong; and the managers close ranks against the public.”

LEENA, SOUTH WEST

“Too many genuine complaints are either ignored or whitewashed away to protect public service images and the personnel involved.”

GEORGE, NORTH WEST

“Nobody ever wants to take responsibility and they should. It's always easier to pass to somebody else and wash your hands. Here speaks someone that had to make 20 contacts with the Inland Revenue just to get self assessment forms sent to us and in the end had to go to our MP to get the matter resolved. And I was wanting to pay my tax?”

TERENCE, SOUTH WEST

“Complaints get overlooked and brushed under the carpet - not taken seriously! Most of them are heartfelt cries to try and get things changed for the better for future users of Government provided services.”

DES, SOUTH EAST

“I lost my husband in hospital due to negligence and gave up on the complaint because I found the lies and cover ups too distressing and traumatic to deal with.”

CHRISTINE, LONDON

“I am fed up of my complaints being ignored or passed around & everybody else is blamed instead. I am physically drained by the way I am treated & ignored, that I do not have the strength to complain anymore. My health is not worth it... so eventually you give up.”

JOANNA, LONDON

7 Whistleblowing

People told us that they feel that whistleblowers in public services are unfairly persecuted and are not adequately protected.

“I want a fair, honest and transparent health service, one where the staff are trusted, whistleblowers are protected and patients are treasured.”

IAN, EAST MIDLANDS

“As I have recently retired and no longer have private health care I will have to rely on the NHS going forward. I do not have confidence in the current complaints system and things need to change. Whistleblowers should be encouraged and not deterred from speaking out where there is bad practice.”

EVELYN, LONDON

“Huge amount wasted at patients' & taxpayers' expense. Why are whistleblowers still bullied at work. They should be praised, not lose their jobs.”

ELAINE, WEST MIDLANDS

“I am sick of hearing about the corruption and injustice that is prevailing across every sector and anybody who dares to think of the common good and blow the whistle, is harassed out of their job or dismissed.”

ROBERT, SCOTLAND

“I fully support our NHS but want to make it far more accountable when things do go wrong. Complaints should be fully dealt with promptly and whistleblowers should be able to do so without fear of losing their jobs.”

MAUREEN, SOUTH EAST

“Too often we hear about the whistleblowers being silenced and genuine concerns of the public ignored to protect the reputations of those people and institutions involved.”

BARBARA, NORTH WEST

“I worked as a Care Assistant in a care home for two months. When I shared my concerns about abuse there, my agreed holiday was refused. I took my holiday but have not returned. I went through their grievance procedure listing 80 abuse related incidences, but the few carers I named denied all wrong-doing and the response was fully biased. I appealed and their response was the same. I was not well enough to attend the disciplinary hearing and they have since dismissed me for gross misconduct for not following policies/procedures. No doubt, the abusive staff are still working there and I am very concerned about the residents in their care. My stress continues.”

C, WEST MIDLANDS

“If something is not right then people should have the right to express their concerns without fear of any retributions. Too many so-called whistleblowers find themselves paying dearly after speaking out, this in turn stops other people speaking out because they are worried about the consequences.”

SYLVIA, EAST OF ENGLAND

“My mother suffered the most appalling indignities and had her basic human rights stripped whilst living in a care home. Institutional abuse is rife and is not even noticed. Those staff who recognise it soon become part of the problem as whistleblowers end up being either ostracised or sacked. I have been left traumatised by the battle to protect my mother but sadly ended with her dying a painful death.”

SHARON, EAST MIDLANDS

“The users of public services are often unable or unwilling to complain, so it is important that those who do ‘whistleblow’ are heard, WITHOUT being ostracised or sacked.”

DR M, NORTH WEST

“I’ve worked for the NHS within an NHS in house agency. A member of staff also a temporary staffing employee was very abusive, I reported her behaviour to the manager in doing so, a serious fabricated complaint was made against me, I’m being investigated and my employment terminated.”

G, LONDON

Research findings on people's experiences of the complaints system

As well as looking at the comments from our supporters we also have the findings from our nationally representative research, which identified similar concerns. It shows that people can be reluctant to complain and experience problems when they do.

Our consumer insight tracker shows that



of people, in 2015, say that they are worried about the quality of public services

This is up from



of people saying they were worried in 2014

We surveyed 4,058 UK adults in February 2015 and found:

Half (49%) of people who have had a problem with a public service over the last year didn't go on to complain. This equates to at least 5.3 million people in the UK.

Key reasons for not complaining included:

35% Not feeling anything would be done about the problem

35% Not feeling it would be worth the effort

20% Not knowing who to complain to

14% Fearing worse treatment as a result

Of those people who did complain:

31%

were **satisfied** with the result of their complaint

48%

said they felt their complaint was **ignored**

44%

felt **angry** about the way the complaint was handled

46%

said complaining made the experience more **stressful**

24%

felt that they or their relative experienced **worse treatment** as a result

33%

wished they **hadn't bothered** to complain

26%

said the experience had **put them off** complaining again



THE PROBLEMS

Taking into account the feedback we have had from our supporters, the results from our survey of the general public, and our research into the complaints system, Which? believes that there are five key problems that need to be addressed:

1 Regulators do not adequately monitor and act on complaints

High levels of unresolved complaints about a particular service should be a critical flag to the regulator that something is wrong with a public service and the way complaints are being handled.

Regulators are not currently fully capitalising on this: not all regulators monitor complaints data and use it to inform inspection activity; and regulators are often not drawing on dissatisfaction expressed via social media.

This means that regulators are missing opportunities to help improve services, but also to demonstrate action to the public which could in turn increase the likelihood that people make complaints in the future. For example, seven in ten people (71%) in our survey say they would be more likely to complain about a problem if their complaint would result in a direct action.

2 People are not adequately supported when making a complaint

Two significant barriers to people coming forward to making a complaint are not knowing who to make a complaint to, or fearing worse treatment as a result.

The representation and practical assistance provided by complaints advocacy services, as well as the signposting and advice provided by other services, can play a helpful role in addressing this.

Whilst these services exist in health, they are not always available when people need them or across public services. In childcare and social care people who complain do not have access to adequate support or advocacy to help them raise their concerns.

In health, in addition to formal advocacy services, people can access support from Patient Advice and Liaison Services (PALS) and Healthwatch, although PALS has been criticised for a lack of independence and Healthwatch for low visibility.

For example, only a small proportion of people with complaints about health services had drawn on any form of support:



Conversely, **62%** report they would be more likely to complain if there was greater support to help them through the process.

3 Ombudsmen in public services need to be rebuilt around people

The ombudsmen in public services have developed over time and are highly fragmented, consisting of multiple organisations with overlapping remits.

This means there is confusion about where to take complaints to, and low levels of awareness of ombudsmen. For example, only 46% of people have heard of the Parliamentary and Health Services Ombudsman, 44% have heard of The Office of the Independent Adjudicator and 63% have heard of the Local Government Ombudsman.

It also means that there is greater risk that complaints will fall through the gaps. In some services, including childcare and academy schools, people have no access to an ombudsman.

And there is significant variation with ombudsmen performance and practice. They have varying processes, timescales, remits, approaches and means of taking complaints; and it is not clear that best practice is being shared. This can impact on whether or not people escalate complaints.

We found that



only **27%** of people who made a complaint to a provider, and felt it wasn't resolved, took their complaints further (e.g. to an ombudsman or regulator).

Of those who didn't take it further



66% said this was because they thought it wouldn't make any difference.

and



34% said it was because they didn't know that they could.

4 Organisations who speak on behalf of people are not being heard

We know from our research that people are less likely to complain about public services than they are in private markets. With people feeling powerless to effect change for themselves, opportunities to improve services are being lost.

In private markets, representative bodies, including Which?, have the power to make super-complaints to the regulator where they identify systemic issues, to which the regulator has to respond. No equivalent power exists in public services as yet.

5 Staff concerns can be ignored or silenced by providers

Staff can be a key source of insight into problems with a service and yet evidence suggests that where employees do voice concerns these are not always acted upon. This can lead to serious detriment going unnoticed and was a common concern raised by our supporters.

The inquiry into Mid-Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust, where suspicions were raised due to unusually high death rates, identified that the voices of staff had been ignored by the Trust board.

Similarly, concerns raised by a whistleblower at Winterborne View Hospital on staff mistreating and abusing adults with learning disabilities were ignored. The Care Quality Commission later admitted that they had failed to respond to the whistleblower's concerns.

Progress is being made in health following the Francis Inquiry and organisations such as Public Concern at Work are there to support those who want to raise concerns. But there is still much to be done to change the culture in the NHS.



THE SOLUTIONS

Which? has identified five solutions to the problems raised by consumers of public services. The Government from May 2015 needs to reform the complaints system by:

- 1** Requiring all regulators of public services to use complaints to trigger inspections
- 2** Giving people access to high-quality support to help them to complain
- 3** Introducing a single public services ombudsman to deal with complaints effectively
- 4** Allowing representative groups to make super-complaints on behalf of groups and individuals
- 5** Ensuring whistleblowers are listened to and their concerns are acted upon

1 **Require all regulators of public services to use complaints to trigger inspections**

People's complaints should have the power to trigger inspections and drive improvements in services to increase public confidence and their willingness to complain.

This would give regulators valuable intelligence on the quality of service delivery.

Inspection activity should be informed from drawing on complaints data to give a direction to the timing and substance of an inspection of a provider.

2 **Give people access to high-quality support to help them to complain**

It should be the norm, not the exception, that people are supported to access the complaints system and to speak up about problems.

Services to help individuals make a complaint should be accessible across public services.

All people who wish to complain about a public service should have access to easy-to-find and high-quality support if they need it. This support should be the same wherever in the country you live, be independent of the provider and be a champion of the people in public services.

Barriers to accessing the complaints system should be swept away. People should be supported through a single portal to make complaints about public services in England, as there is in Wales.

This portal should signpost people to the right point in the system for their complaint, and make sure that providers and commissioners of public services are tackling complaints.

3 **Introduce a single public services ombudsman to deal with complaints swiftly**

Ombudsmen can play a powerful role in acting as a champion of complaints and supporting people to gain redress when they experience a problem.

The current public services ombudsman landscape is fragmented and confusing and should be reformed. A single public services ombudsman should be introduced, replacing the current bodies covering all public services, including those services not currently covered by an ombudsman such as childcare and academy schools.

The public services ombudsman for England should have a role in ensuring a fair and accessible complaints system at the local level, and driving improvements in public services through their recommendations and insight gained from complaints.

4 **Allow representative groups to make super-complaints on behalf of groups and individuals**

The collective voice of people who use public services should be heard. Super-complaints exist in private markets and are being introduced by the Home Office in relation to policing.

There should be an expanded and strengthened public service super-complaint power that covers all public services to enable designated bodies, including consumer representatives, to bring forward issues on behalf of groups of people.

The power should be expanded to cover all regulators in all public services markets including health, social care, schools, childcare and higher education. Regulators in public services should be required to formally consider these complaints, as private market regulators do, and take further action to ensure that problems are tackled.

5 **Ensure whistleblowers are listened to and their concerns are acted upon**

Creating a genuinely open culture to complaints and feedback requires providers and regulators to listen and act when staff raise concerns about the quality or safety of a service. They are closest to our public services and are likely to have expert insight into emerging problems and risks from poor quality services.

Whistleblowers across public services should be supported and staff should feel safe to raise their concerns. Silencing staff concerns and using gagging clauses is an indicator of a culture that is not willing to act on complaints.



CONCLUSIONS

Complaints from people are a valuable source of intelligence in public services. They can alert providers to problems with a service that they otherwise might not become aware of, and identify where improvements are needed; they can also act as a critical flag to regulators that there are potentially systemic issues that need to be addressed.

The research and responses to the Make Complaints Count campaign provide a real cause for concern around the failures to listen to, and act on, people's complaints.

It is essential that the next Government introduces reforms to make sure people are better supported, that the system works for them, and action is taken from complaints.

To ensure these reforms have impact the Government should introduce the following in the first session of the next Parliament:

- Legislation in the Queen's Speech to set up a single public services ombudsman, expand a duty of candour across all public services, reform advocacy and support services, establish super-complaint powers in public services, and create a link between complaints and regulatory inspections.
- A single portal for public service complaints.
- A requirement across all public service providers to support and protect whistleblowers.

For further details about the Make Complaints Count campaign visit: [which.co.uk/publicservices](https://www.which.co.uk/publicservices)

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