

SCOAF Business Plan

2021-2022

Version Control

Date	Version	Details
March 21	1.0	Draft
April 21	1.1	Added Strat Objectives; in-year priorities
May 21	1.2	Issued

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Foreword by the Ombudsman



This Business Plan is my first as Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces (SCOAF), and represents the first step towards delivering our new Strategic Objectives. It sets out how SCOAF intends to deliver these objectives and support the Service Complaint system, and how this work supports our vision and mission. This plan builds on the great work carried out by SCOAF so far, whilst setting an ambitious programme of activity designed to improve our service.

Our new 5 year Strategic Objectives set out what we intend to achieve by the end of my tenure in 2025. These objectives focus on quality of our service, our independence, the importance of outreach and sharing insight to improve understanding, and playing an active role in the wider legislative landscape.

The Business Plan outlines the specific activities we will deliver in 2021-22. These activities underpin the strategic objectives and are key in continuing to build an organisation that provides a quality service - one where we listen and provide fair and reasonable outcomes in a timely manner.

The key themes for this year are:

- 1. Providing an efficient and high-quality service to complainants.** This includes greater transparency about performance, robust quality assurance and the further reduction of our backlog.
- 2. Raising awareness and knowledge of my role across the Armed Forces,** through improved training, education and increased visibility.
- 3. Improving services within my office.** This includes improvements to operational efficiency and the introduction of governance frameworks, and a renewed focus on the development and wellbeing of our staff.

This is an exciting time for SCOAF - the launch of new 5 year Strategic Objectives offers a real opportunity to think differently and focus our efforts to maximise our impact. SCOAF will continue to improve, develop and raise our standards, as we pursue our goal of helping to build a better Service Complaints system for all Service personnel.

Mariette Hughes, Ombudsman

Who we are

The Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces (SCOAF) was established on 1st January 2016 as part of wide reforms to the Service Complaints process. This replaced the Office of the Service Complaints Commissioner which operated from 2008-2015.

Role

The role of the Ombudsman is to provide independent and impartial oversight of the handling of the Service Complaints system for members of the UK Armed Forces. The Ombudsman achieves this through 3 main functions:

- Helping Service personnel access the complaint system;
- Investigating, and
- Reporting to Parliament.

The Ombudsman cannot deal with enquiries or complaints that fall outside of their jurisdiction – this includes dealing with queries from members of the public or family members' matters.

Legislation

The legislation governing the role of the Ombudsman includes:

- [Armed Forces \(Service Complaints and Financial Assistance\) Act 2015](#)
- [The Armed Forces \(Service Complaints\) Regulations 2015](#)
- [The Armed Forces \(Service Complaints Miscellaneous Provisions\) Regulations 2015](#)
- [The Armed Forces \(Service Complaints Ombudsman Investigations\) Regulations 2015](#)

Mission

To provide independent oversight and investigations in support of an effective, efficient and fair Service Complaints process for members of the UK Armed Forces.

Vision

The Ombudsman's vision is that all Service personnel have access to and confidence in a Service Complaints system that is efficient, effective and fair.

Values

SCOAF's values have been developed in close consultation with our staff so we all have a shared understanding of the type of ombudsman service we want to be.

The values are:

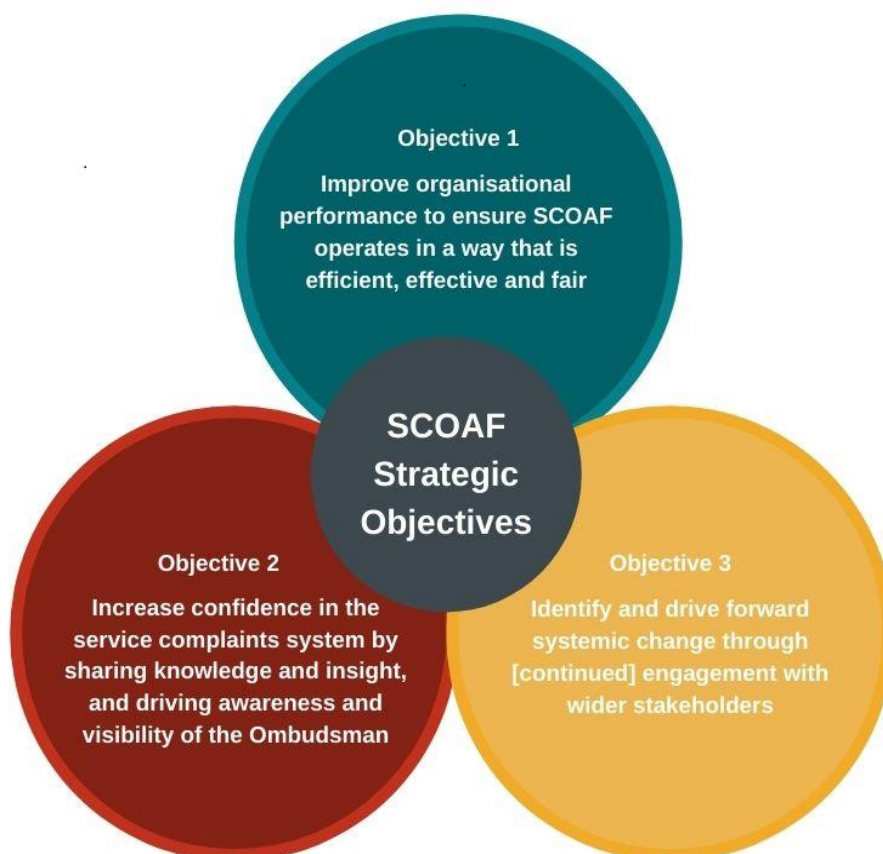
- **Independence** – The SCOAF is independent from the Service's we investigate. We will hold them to account for service failure or injustice.
- **Impartiality** – The SCOAF is fully impartial. All investigations are undertaken on their own merits. We do not take sides.
- **Integrity** - The SCOAF ensures it is consistent in it's approach, adhering to policy and process and acting within the confines of jurisdiction.

SCOAF Strategic Objectives

SCOAF's priorities for this year have been drawn from three Strategic Objectives identified for the next five years. The strategic plan was developed in consultation with staff, all of whom have contributed ideas and insight. This is important as an organisation can only succeed if its people understand and buy into its purpose and its objectives.

Consideration has also been given to the nature of the existing relationships with key stakeholders and the Services, and their reflections on what value SCOAF could provide in support of the shared goal of a better Service Complaints system.

Finally, SCAOF has considered this strategy in the context of the wider ombudsman landscape, and how we can best fulfil our role as a champion of good complaints handling, and how we can ensure we are playing an active role in shaping the legislative landscape around Service Complaints.



Our plans 2021-22: Delivering our objectives

With the introduction of three new strategic objectives, the SCOAF Senior Management Team has looked at how those strategic objectives will be met in the short, medium and long term. SCOAF recognises that to “get things right” can take time.

The specific business plan activities identified are designed to be fluid. They will be kept under constant review to ensure they are appropriate and relevant to shifting priorities. This enables SCOAF to respond to changing internal and external dependencies, whilst maintaining focus on the key areas.

SCOAF’s main priorities for this year are:

- To improve operational performance
- Ensure consistency and quality of decisions made
- To improve staff engagement and development
- To provide an infrastructure that enables SCOAF personnel to work effectively
- To deliver an improved outreach programme with greater focus on interaction with personnel across all ranks
- To work collaboratively with key stakeholders to increase awareness and understanding of the Ombudsman’s function, while sharing best practice to achieve a common goal
- To ensure our service is accessible
- To produce an Annual Report in line with SCOAF’s statutory obligations

SCOAF In-Year Activity 2021-22

Strategic Objective	Business Plan Activity 2021/22	Target Date	Mid Year Update
<p>Improve organisational performance to ensure SCOAF operates in a way that is efficient, effective and fair</p> <p><i>SCOAF should be able to hold themselves to the same standards used in appraising the performance of the Services. By improving the way we operate, SCOAF will be able to provide a better experience for those accessing our service, to the Services, and to our own staff.</i></p>	Review of referrals and enquiries processes to ensure they are as efficient as possible	Jun-21	Review took place 20 October
	Introduction of casework audits to ensure staff are working in the same way	Jun-21	Delayed
	Review standardisation of decision letters to ensure consistency in processes	Jun-21	In Place
	Produce a guide to casework to ensure investigators are working in the same way	Jun-21	In Place
	Review central library of SCOAF key documents to create one source of knowledge to improve consistency	May-21	Complete
	Formalise feedback and learning loop (incl JR threats) to share knowledge across team	Jul-21	Ongoing
	Review of consolatory payments to ensure consistency in decision making	Jul-21	Delayed - No action to date
	Reduce silo working to ensure investigators are getting consistent QA feedback and working in the same way across the whole team	Oct-21	Ongoing
	Set up programme of activity with staff engagement group to help them deliver meaningful positive change for staff	Jun-21	Ongoing
	Establish yearly training on Service life for all staff to give them a greater understanding of the Services to aid them in delivery of their roles	Mar-22	Ongoing – sessions are being arranged for 2022. A session has also been held remotely

	Standardised training package for investigators and enquiries team (internal and external training) so they all have the same high quality training	Oct-21	Ongoing – training courses have been identified
	Create development paths for all roles so staff are aware of opportunities	Oct-21	Complete
	Create 'How To Guides' - for each role (to replace Handover notes) to improve resilience and contingency planning in absence of staff in key roles	Jun-21	Complete.
	IT Procurement so staff have good IT and to facilitate better communication with staff when working remotely	Sept-21	Complete.
	Improve housekeeping, including reduction in use of paper, to reduce storage of paper documents, reduce costs and be more environmentally friendly.	Mar-22	Ongoing
	Aim to become a paperless office with support of the Services (Service files) to facilitate easier remote working and reduction in use of paper	Jan-22	Ongoing
	MoU with MOD to give reassurance around our independence and governance	Dec-21	On target
<p>Increase confidence in the service complaints system by sharing knowledge and insight, and driving awareness and visibility of the Ombudsman</p> <p><i>SCOAF must go further to share the trends, learning and insight in order that improvement to the Service Complaints system as a whole can be made, along with ensuring that Service personnel are aware of SCOAF and the services provided.</i></p>	<p>Focus Groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Re-design focus group sessions to enable greater interaction between SCOAF & Service personnel -Trial proposed changes to ensure changes are beneficial 	<p>Jun-21</p> <p>Mar-22</p>	<p>On Hold- focus groups will be implemented from Jan 22</p>
	<p>Focus Groups Feedback:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Design a questionnaire for completion following focus groups to ensure Service personnel find them beneficial and to improve collection of information on issues impacting Service personnel. 	<p>May-21</p>	<p>Complete</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Analyse data from focus groups to inform AR and presentations. 	<p>Dec-21</p>	<p>On target</p>
	<p>Launch of bespoke survey to gather more information on the experiences of Service personnel and our service delivery.</p>		<p>Complete: Survey is available on the website.</p>

	Production and launch of VODCasts for all 3 Services to enable message from Ombudsman to reach a wider audience across the Services	July-21	Complete
	New print campaigns to increase awareness of Ombudsman and her powers	July-21	Complete
	Draft a schedule of blogs/vlogs to be published to help raise awareness around issues in Service complaints	Jun-21	Complete
	Introduce quarterly thematic to share with the Services to help improve their knowledge about complaint handling and customer service	Sep-21	Complete – First thematic published 15 Nov 21
	Anonymised examples of good responses/language to share with Services to highlight good work	Jan-22	Ongoing
	Restart bi-annuals with Services & MOD to facilitate the sharing of information and best practice between the organisations	Sep-21	Complete – first meeting held on 27 September
	Development of an online form to increase the accessibility of SCOAF to complainants	Jan-22	Ongoing – forms part of the wider Website tender process
	Tender for a new Website to ensure SCOAF has a continued online presence	Oct-21	Complete – website to go live in Jan 22
	Factsheets on processes sent to all complainants to ensure they receive clear explanations of processes	May-21	Complete
	Engage with CDP on plans/recomms to ensure they are aware of issues and successes	Sep-21	Ongoing
Identify and drive forward systemic change through [continued] engagement with wider stakeholders	Produce a schedule of engagement with charity groups and stakeholders to raise the profile of SCOAF	Jun-21	Complete – but will remain under review
	Build networks with the ICOAF community to share best practice	Mar-22	Ongoing

SCOAF must ensure it is correctly positioned to be able to drive systemic change through focused engagement. By ensuring our voice is heard in the right places, we will be in a better position to improve the system

Scoping for a Stakeholder Symposium in 2022 with the aim of delivering a high quality event to facilitate engagement with SCOAF's key stakeholders	Oct-21	Ongoing - first scoping meeting held October 21
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SCOAF Strategic Objectives 2021-2025

Improve organisational performance to ensure SCOAF operates in a way that is efficient, effective and fair

SCOAF should be able to hold themselves to the same standards used in appraising the performance of the Services. By improving the way we operate, SCOAF will be able to provide a better experience for those accessing our service, to the Services, and to our own staff.

<p>Performance</p> <p>Improved operational performance will result in the elimination of the backlog, and an improvement in the timeliness KPI. Reducing wait times for our service will result in an improvement in customer satisfaction, and will free up operational resources for focus on other areas of work.</p>	<p>Quality</p> <p>Ensuring the consistency and quality of the decisions made by SCOAF improves the experience for service users, as well as the Single Service secretariats. It ensures that the right decision is reached in every case, and that the reasoning for our decisions is clearly understood by all parties. Elimination of silo working means that lessons learned are shared more effectively across the organisation, and can be fed into learning and outreach for the Services.</p>	<p>People</p> <p>Our people are our most valuable asset. By focusing on staff engagement and development, we will improve retention and ensure that our people are empowered to provide the best service possible.</p>	<p>Infrastructure & Governance</p> <p>SCOAF needs to be able to operate efficiently, ensuring the appropriate levels of assurance being given to MOD. This will be demonstrated in the improvement of internal operating and reporting protocols, and the establishment of clear protocols with MOD. This priority also addresses the need to move away from reliance on paper files, and ensure IT services are fit for purpose.</p>
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Increase confidence in the service complaints system by sharing knowledge and insight, and driving awareness and visibility of the Ombudsman

SCOAF must go further to share the trends, learning and insight in order that improvement to the Service Complaints system as a whole can be made, along with ensuring that Service personnel are aware of SCOAF and the services provided.

<p>Awareness</p> <p>SCOAF must ensure that Service personnel are aware of the Service Complaints process, and the ombudsman's role within this. Further work must be done to understand the reasons why individuals</p>	<p>Learning</p> <p>Sharing the trends, insights and learning gained through investigation of Service Complaints will allow for improvements to be made by the Secretariats in their handling of matters. The</p>	<p>Accessibility</p> <p>Ensuring that our service is accessible, by making sure our material is easy to understand, and service users understand what they can expect from our investigations. Ensuring our language</p>
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<p>may not feel comfortable accessing the Service Complaints system</p>	<p>Ombudsman has a responsibility to share best practice in complaints handling, and provide practical tips and guidance to the Services</p>	<p>and approaches take into account all relevant aspects of EDI, and reflect best practice for the sector</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Identify and drive forward systemic change through [continued] engagement with wider stakeholders</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>SCOAF must ensure it is correctly positioned to be able to drive systemic change through focused engagement. By ensuring our voice is heard in the right places, we will be in a better position to improve the system</i></p>		
<p style="text-align: center;">Collaboration</p> <p>Ensuring that recommendations are understood and readily accepted, for the benefit of the system as a whole. Ensuring continued engagement with MOD and HCDC, along with each of the Services</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Building Networks</p> <p>Reaching out to a wider range of stakeholders, to ensure that all perspectives on the Service Complaint system are heard and understood</p>	

Finance

The SCOAF budget is provided by Defence and is bid for annually based on the previous year's activity and any future one off projects. The business costs cover machinery, accommodation, IT, training etc.

Table [1] – SCOAF ABC ¹Allocation

	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22
Staff Costs	1,704,251	1,414,855	1,600,00	1,700,000
Business Costs	702,639	584,527	500,000	600,000
Fee Earner	156,060	159,181	200,000	200,000

People

SCOAF has 25 active² permanent positions. In addition, SCOAF has a pool of four fee-earning investigators utilised on an ad-hoc basis to carry out maladministration and/or substance investigations as required.

Over the course of the year we will be considering our staffing structure and looking to ensure that our resources requirements are optimised and understood.

Table [2] –Position Profile

Employee Type	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23
Civilian	24	24	24	24
Fee Earner	5	5	4	4
Crown Appointee	1	1	1	1
Fixed Term	3	3	0	0

Table [3] – Current Post Profile (for permanent posts)

Employee Type	Posts	Vacant
Chief of Operations	1	0
Head of Investigations	1	0
Senior Investigator	7	2
Investigator	3	0
Enquiries/Referrals	3	1
Head of Office	1	0
Business Support	5	2
Statistician	1	0
Administrative Support	2	0

¹ ABC – Activity Based Costing

² By “active” we mean open positions which may or may not be filled.

Table [x] – Manpower Profile³

Employee Type	Posts	Filled	Vacant
Civilian	24	19	5
Fee Earner	4	4	0
Crown Appointee	1	1	1

Training and Education

All SCOAF staff complete mandatory training covering areas such as Health and Safety, Information Management, diversity and inclusion. The Business Manager monitors completion of mandatory training.

To ensure SCOAF staff are able to develop both professionally and personally a key priority for this year is to develop a comprehensive training package for all staff. This will also include broader learning such as visits to Ministry of Defence (MoD) establishments.

Wellbeing and staff engagement

SCOAF has established a Staff Engagement Team who is responsible for driving forward change in line with Staff Survey results and ensuring that all members of SCOAF have an active role to play in meeting business objectives.

SCOAF has two Mental Health First Aiders who are a point of contact for an employee who is experiencing a **mental health** issue or emotional distress. This interaction could range from having an initial conversation through to supporting the person to get appropriate help.

Risk and Assurance

SCOAF's top 3 risks are:

SCOAF operational performance targets are missed; this risk relates to the existing backlog of cases, staffing issues, and the efficiency with which SCOAF operates, and affects our ability to instil trust and confidence in the system. Key BP activities to address this risk include the introduction of casework audits; improved knowledge sharing via a formalised feedback and learning loop and a review of the existing enquiries and referrals function to ensure it's working optimally.

SCOAF infrastructure inadequate to meet objectives: This risk relates to IT and services for example telephony, software restrictions and how this could impact SCOAF staff being able to remain operational. Key BP activities to address this risk include issuing staff with Windows10 enabled laptops and the implementation of an improved IT infrastructure.

Covid-19 pandemic affects the operation of SCOAF: This risk relates to the current COVID pandemic and the impact this may have on staff wellbeing, accessibility to case files;

³ As at April 2021
Version 1.2

training, the ability to undertake outreach and overall operational effectiveness. Key BP activities to address this risk include moving towards a paperless office, improved IT and Telephony and flexible working.

All SCOAF risks are monitored monthly with a full in-depth review every quarter.

Holding to Account

The SCOAF holds monthly management boards which address key issues, risks and trends. All actions are recorded.

All investigative work is peer reviewed to ensure it meets jurisdiction in line with the SCOAF internal operations manual.