

Our role at the Legal Ombudsman is to resolve complaints in a way that is fair and reasonable in the circumstances of each case. We are independent and impartial. We don't take sides, and we don't make assumptions about who might be right or wrong in any particular case.

We look at the facts and weigh up the evidence and will tell you our view. If we think there is no poor service, we will explain why we think that. Or if we think there is something to put right and agreement can't be reached, then we have official powers to order what needs to be done.

How long will it take you to look at my complaint in detail?

Once we've taken your initial details and confirmed what your complaint is about, your investigator will look at the information you have provided and will contact you within 10 working days. When they contact you, your investigator will provide you with their direct contact details.

We aim to resolve complaints within three months of the date you confirmed the details of your complaint with us although it can be longer if your complaint is more complex or if an ombudsman's decision is needed.

What evidence do you need to look into my complaint?

As part of looking into the problem you've raised with us, your investigator will ask both you and your claims management company to provide us with evidence. Our investigator will look at the facts and weigh up the evidence to reach a conclusion. We will give both you and the claims management company the opportunity to see this evidence and hear why the investigator has come to a particular view. If at any point the investigator refers to facts you have not seen, please let them know so they can share it.

Please treat the information provided as being confidential to the people directly involved in our investigation. Please do not pass it on to anyone who is not involved. We can stop the investigation and close your case if you pass on confidential information you have obtained during the investigation to someone who is not directly involved. This is due to the law we operate under and is intended to help people have confidence in the process (and be sure that personal information is protected) while being able to resolve complaints as quickly and fairly as possible.

All documents you send to us will be scanned on to our computer system and then destroyed after 28 days. Please **do not** send us original documents unless we ask you to. If we do ask you to send us original documents, we will keep them safe and return them to you.

Do you ever end an investigation for any reason?

You should know that if we receive further information during an investigation which shows we can't look at the complaint under our rules, we could stop the investigation and close the case. For example, this could be because the complaint actually falls outside of our time limits.

How will you stay in touch?

We generally try to speak to you on the telephone as this is the best way to ensure we have a good understanding of your complaint and to say what will happen next. If this is not possible, we will use email and/or a letter. As investigators have several ongoing investigations, you should expect to be updated about every two to three weeks.

How will you resolve my complaint?

From the start of the investigation and throughout it, we will look for opportunities to resolve your problem by finding a solution that you and your claims management company can agree to.

The investigator will listen to what both of you have to say, ensuring that they don't take sides and that they achieve a fair outcome. It can be quicker to sort out a problem if everyone agrees what the solution needs to be. But if you don't feel comfortable, you don't have to agree to anything.

What if me and my claims management company can't agree?

The investigator will pass the case to a senior investigator who will write a preliminary decision that sets out the relevant facts and the views and opinions of both parties. The senior investigator will conclude the decision by providing their view on the level of service that has been provided. If a poor service has been provided, the investigator will make a proposal for putting things right: this is our 'recommendation'.

We send the decision to both you and the service provider for you to tell us what you think. When you respond, you should focus on letting us know:

- If any of the facts we have used are incorrect;
- If you accept or reject the decision; and
- If you reject the decision, briefly explain why.

If you and your service provider *agree* to the decision we will treat your complaint as resolved.

If you *disagree* with our decision, let your investigator know your reasons why and confirm that you would like an ombudsman to make a final decision.

If you don't respond to our decision or if you don't tell us that you disagree with it, we'll treat the complaint as resolved. We'll close the case and take no further action. We don't normally reopen cases other than in exceptional circumstances.

Can I ask for an ombudsman's recommendation?

If you disagree with the investigator's decision and ask for an ombudsman's decision, the ombudsman will review the case, including your reasons for disagreeing with the investigator's decision, and make a decision. The decision will be confirmed to you and the claims management company in writing.

An ombudsman takes a look at the complaint in light of the investigator decision, as a fair answer to the complaint and may reach a different view of what is appropriate to resolve it. The decision could be different from the decision made by your investigator, so please bear that in mind. The ombudsman's decision may be more or less favourable to you for instance.

If we think that the claims management company's service was poor and something needs to be put right, we can order them to do any of the following things:

- Apologise to you;
- Give you back any documents you might need;
- Put things right if more work can correct what went wrong;
- Refund or reduce your fees; or
- Pay compensation if you have lost out or been badly treated (most of our orders for compensation are for less than £1,000 but we can order up to £50,000).

Is the ombudsman's decision final?

After an ombudsman has made a decision, we will ask you if you accept it. If you accept it, then the claims management company must do what it says.

Once you have accepted an ombudsman's decision, the claims management company must comply with it, and the complaint is then treated as closed. This means you won't be able to have the same complaint looked at again. Accepting an ombudsman's decision also stops you from making any other claim in relation to the complaint.

If you reject the decision or don't tell us what you think about it, the claims management company is not obliged to comply with the decision. In these circumstances, your case will be closed without further action.

Once a final decision has been made our investigation of your complaint is over.

What if I am unhappy with the service provided by the Legal Ombudsman?

We want you to tell us as soon as possible if you are unhappy with the level of service we have provided when handling your complaint. An example of a service complaint might include our failure to keep you informed or our failure to explain things properly to you. However, our service complaint procedure does not cover any dissatisfaction felt at the outcome of an investigation or any final decision that we make about the level of service provided.

Please contact the investigator at the Legal Ombudsman who you usually deal with. They, with their manager, will try to put right anything we may have done wrong as quickly as possible. They will acknowledge your complaint about our service within two working days of hearing from you. They will then look into your concern and respond to you within 20 working days of receiving your complaint.

If we are unable to resolve your complaint about our service at this stage, we will explain the full process we have for responding to you so that you can decide what to do next.

Full details of our complaints policy can be found on our website:

<http://www.legalombudsman.org.uk/?portfolio=service-complaint-procedure>

Important things to know about how we handle your information

Calls are recorded, including calls you make to us, calls we make to you as well as calls to other people and organisations.

We will need to handle personal details about you which could include sensitive information.

We will need to share information we consider relevant about your complaint with the service provider and with their approved regulator.

We may also share details of your complaint with carefully selected third parties for research purposes, such as customer satisfaction surveys. If you don't want us to use these details or to be contacted for these purposes, please let us know.

We comply with data protection rules at all times. You can contact our dedicated team (compliance@legalombudsman.org.uk) for further information about this and any freedom of information requests.

All documents you send to us will be scanned on to our computer system and then destroyed after 28 days. Case related information that is stored electronically will usually be deleted 18 months after the case file is closed.



The Legal Ombudsman is committed to delivering high quality customer service in a timely, flexible manner that meets individual needs, situations and expectations. Our Service Principles are a reflection of our core values of being **Open, Fair, Independent and Effective**. Our Standards apply to all, and show how we respect and respond to each other internally and externally with our customers and stakeholders. The Service Principles and Standards set out what this commitment means in practice and what our customers can expect from us



OPEN - We will always be clear with you

Our service standards

- We will communicate using plain English so you can make appropriate, informed choices.
- We will discuss with you at the beginning what you can expect from the service we provide.
- We will explain the complaints process and keep you updated about what is happening throughout.

You can expect us to:

- Communicate in a way that can be understood, avoiding using jargon, providing clear and relevant information.
- Listen carefully and ask questions to understand your complaint.
- Be professional and knowledgeable.
- Make sure everyone is clear about our process at every stage of the complaint



OPEN - We will be understanding and approachable

Our service standards

- We will recognise each individual's perspectives and experiences.
- We will take your individual needs into account.
- We will offer support in a variety of ways via BrowseAloud, large print, and languages other than English to help you access our service.

You can expect us to:

- Be polite and treat you with respect.
- Listen to you and take your views seriously.
- Be empathetic and sensitive to your needs, and support them.
- Make reasonable adjustments for people who require them.



EFFECTIVE - We will make good use of everyone's time

Our service standards

- We will deal with your complaint efficiently and keep you informed about progress.
- We will help both parties resolve the complaint at the earliest opportunity.
- We understand that some complaints can be complicated: we will be honest about what we can deliver.

You can expect us to:

- Ensure we understand your needs and deal with your complaint promptly.
- Keep you informed at all times throughout your involvement with us as to what to expect and when to expect it.
- Let you know as soon as possible if we are unable to help you.



FAIR/INDEPENDENT - We will be impartial, thorough, and base our work on facts

Our service standards

- We will be clear about what information we need from you.
- We will listen to what you have to say and consider relevant information provided by both parties before any final decision is reached.
- We will reach our decision based on information and what is balanced, fair and reasonable.
- We will provide a clear explanation of our decision.

You can expect us to:

- Ensure we are objective, non-judgmental, and fair throughout the investigation.
- Help you identify what information is needed, and be clear what can be used.
- Be consistent in our approach.
- Communicate our decisions clearly and concisely.



EFFECTIVE - We will make a difference

Our service standards

- We will be an independent voice and use our experience to inform debate within the legal, claims management and ombudsman sectors.
- We will help improve the complaint practices of service providers.
- We will identify the main causes of complaints and feed best practice information back to service providers.
- We will publish ombudsman decisions on our website, which will include information that is accurate, easy to find and understandable

You can expect us to:

- Listen to, consider, and learn from feedback we receive.
- Engage with service providers to provide support based on our learning.
- Provide information and learning to service providers by delivering external courses.