
How do we sort out problems?

Our job is to look at complaints about service providers in a fair way and without taking sides.

If we think the service complained about was of a reasonable standard, we will explain why. If we agree that the service complained about was poor – and that has had a negative impact – we will explain what we think should be done to put things right. We aim to resolve complaints by agreement but also have formal powers to put things right.

Our service is free for consumers.

Who can use our service?

All members of the public, very small businesses, charities, clubs and trusts can use our service. If someone has died, and there is a problem with their will or estate, we may also be able to help.

We prefer you come to us directly, but you may want another person to act on your behalf. We will need you to confirm this in writing. You could ask a friend, relative or another service provider but check first whether they will charge you for this.

What problems can we help resolve?

We can investigate lots of different types of legal service problems; for instance, if you've had poor service when you bought or sold a house, made a personal injury claim or tried to sort out a family issue.

We can look into complaints about all sorts of regulated service providers – solicitors, barristers, licensed conveyancers, cost lawyers, legal executives, notaries, patent attorneys, trade mark attorneys, law firms and companies providing legal services.

Regulated legal service providers should tell you about the Legal Ombudsman – an easy way to tell if we can sort out your problem.

When can't we help?

We are unable to:

- Provide legal advice or represent you in legal proceedings;
- Recommend service providers or check whether a service provider is regulated;
- Investigate where you are complaining about someone else's service provider.
- Investigate where a complaint is made outside of our time limits.
- Investigate a complaint about something our Scheme Rules say we are unable to look at.

When can you bring a complaint to us?

You must give your service provider the opportunity to resolve your complaint first. Please see our “How to complain to your legal service provider” factsheet and example formal complaint letter for tips on how to do this.

Once you have made a complaint to your service provider, they have up to eight weeks to respond. If you aren't happy with their final response, or they haven't responded within the eight weeks, you can then ask us to look at it. Come to us as soon as you can after trying to resolve your complaint with the service provider – don't delay.

Ordinarily, you can ask us to look at your complaint if it meets all three of the steps below:

1. The problem or when you found out about it, happened after 5 October 2010; **and**
2. You are referring your complaint to the Legal Ombudsman within either of the following:
 - Six years of the problem happening; **or**
 - Three years from when you found out about it; **and**
3. You are referring your complaint to us within six months of your service provider's final response.

If your complaint does not meet these time limits we may not be able to investigate it.

A final response should tell you that they have nothing further to say in their response to your complaint and, if you are still unhappy with the reply, to contact the Legal Ombudsman.

How can you bring a complaint to us?

You can phone, email or write to us. Our complaint form can be found on our website, which also has all the information we use to look at whether your complaint is something we can help with.

Our first step is to check that we have the powers to help resolve your problem. We will ask about you, your service provider, the timeframes and the details of your complaint.

When you contact us it will help if you have:

- The name and address of the service provider;
- The date you first told them about your complaint;
- The date you first became aware of the problem; and
- Details of their response.

We will ask you to send us a copy of your complaint and copies of any responses from the service provider. You don't need to send us more information at this stage. We just need enough to get started and will ask for more information later if we need it.

If we can investigate your problem, your case will be passed to an investigator, who will listen to what both sides have to say, look at the facts and form an independent view about what happened.

We aim to resolve complaints quickly and informally. If we think the service complained about was of a reasonable standard, we will explain why. If we agree that the service complained about was poor – and that has had a negative impact – we will explain what we think should be done to put things right. In some cases we may suggest a way of resolving the complaint which involves both sides in a bit of give and take.

If it is not possible to reach agreement about resolving a complaint, then we have official powers to sort problems out. If needed, an ombudsman may make a decision, which, once agreed, is final and binding.

We resolve most complaints in less than three months, although it can be longer if your complaint is more complex.

How to contact us

Website: www.legalombudsman.org.uk
Email: enquiries@legalombudsman.org.uk
Telephone: 0300 555 0333
NGT Lite users: 18001 0300 555 0333
Minicom text phone user: 18002 0300 555 0333
Overseas: +44 121 245 3050
Postal address: PO BOX 6806,
Wolverhampton, WV1 9WJ

If you need information in another language, large print, Braille or on audio CD then please let us know when contacting us.

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 publish data about all cases that require an ombudsman's decision, including the name of the service provider, the decision of the ombudsman and the area of law. We will not publish your

name or personal details. Further information can be found in the 'Data and decisions' area of our website.

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.

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.

Additional information

Is there a charge for your service?

Our service is free to consumers and you can bring a complaint to us yourself.

Can I bring my complaint to you if I've got ongoing court proceedings or I'm taking negligence action?

We wouldn't normally look at a complaint where the consumer was taking legal action against the service provider for negligence, or where a court's decision had dealt with the same circumstances as the complaint to us. If you do ask us to consider a complaint where there are related court proceedings, we will ask you for more information about those proceedings so we can let you know whether we can help in your case. However, you should remember that if you bring a complaint to us and accept our decision, you cannot then bring a court case against the service provider about the same set of circumstances.

I want to complain, should I still pay the service provider's fee?

Your service provider may decide to take action against you if you do not pay any outstanding fees. In order to prevent this, you may wish to pay those fees; the Legal Ombudsman would still be able to investigate your complaint.

If the Legal Ombudsman does find poor service, what can the service provider be asked to do to put things right?

The remedies available to us include, instructing the service provider to:

- Apologise to you;
- Give back any documents you might need;
- Do more work for you, if this will put right what went wrong;
- Refund or reduce your legal fees; or,
- Pay compensation if you have lost out or been badly treated (this can be anything up to £50,000 where there is some financial loss, although most of our awards are under £1,000).

Any remedy will always be based on the individual circumstances of the complaint and what the impact of the poor service has been.

More information about the remedies we've awarded can be found in the 'Data and decisions' area of our website.

Can I ask the Legal Ombudsman to look at my complaint if I've already accepted a remedy from my service provider?

We wouldn't normally look at a complaint where you have already accepted an offer from the service provider to put things right. For example, where you have accepted a reduction in your bill to resolve your complaint. However, we will consider the circumstances before letting you know whether we can help.

Do I need a legal advisor to make a complaint?

Our process is informal so you do not need a legal advisor to make a complaint to us unless you choose to do so. We do not charge for our service but if you use a legal advisor to bring your complaint you will need to check what their charges will be.

Are your decisions legally binding?

If it is not possible to resolve a complaint informally, then we have official powers to sort problems out. Your investigator will tell you their view of how things need to be resolved. If needed, an ombudsman may make a decision, which, once agreed, is final and binding.

How long will all of this take?

Once we have all of the necessary information we resolve most complaints in less than 90 days, although it can be longer if your complaint is more complex.

Can I withdraw from the process once I have brought a complaint to the Legal Ombudsman?

Yes. You can withdraw your complaint at any time.



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.