



Complaint about the council



How to complain to the Local Government Ombudsman

This leaflet is available in large print, Braille, on tape, and in the following languages:

Bengali

Gujarati

Hindi

Punjabi

Urdu

Arabic

Chinese

Greek

Turkish

Vietnamese

Your local council, library or Citizens Advice Bureau may have copies in these formats and languages, or you can get them direct from one of our offices. You can also get the versions in ethnic minority languages from our website, www.lgo.org.uk

We will also do our best to help people who do not speak English and whose first language is not listed above. For more information call our **Adviceline on Lo-call 0845 602 1983.**

This leaflet refers to ‘councils’ and ‘councillors’, but it applies to all the authorities listed in section 3 and to their members.

1 What does the Local Government Ombudsman do?

This leaflet will help you make a complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman. It does not tell you every detail about what the Ombudsman does, because it is sometimes complex and we do not want to mislead anyone. We will give you more information after we receive your complaint. However, if you decide that you do want to know more before you send in your complaint, please call our **Adviceline on Lo-call 0845 602 1983** and ask for a copy of ***How the Ombudsman will deal with your complaint*** or see our website, **www.lgo.org.uk**

We investigate complaints about councils and the other authorities listed in **section 3**. We aim to get them to put things right if they have gone wrong and if this has affected you directly.

In our investigations:

- **we do not take sides;**
- **our service is free; and**
- **our service is private – that is, we have to give a copy of your complaint to the council, but we will not tell anyone else about it.**

After you have read this leaflet, if you are still not sure what to do next about your complaint, you can contact our **Adviceline on Lo-call 0845 602 1983**.

Equal opportunities

We are committed to giving an equal service to all. This means we will not treat you any differently because of your: *sex, colour, race, nationality, ethnic group, regional or national origin, age, marital status, disability, political or religious belief, sexuality or class.*



2 Do you need special help to use our service?

We have arrangements to help you if you have difficulty using our service, for example if you have a disability or if English is not your first language. For instance, if you need an interpreter, we can arrange this. We can also produce letters and reports in large print, in Braille or on tape. Phone our **Adviceline on Lo-call 0845 602 1983**.

3 Which authorities can you complain about?

You can complain to us about the following authorities.

- **Councils (district, borough, city or county, but not town or parish).**
- **Education appeal panels.**
- **School governing bodies (admission matters only).**
- **School organisation committees.**
- **Housing action trusts (but not housing associations).**
- **Joint boards of local authorities.**
- **National park authorities.**
- **Fire authorities.**
- **Police authorities (but not about the investigation or prevention of crime).**
- **The Greater London Authority.**
- **The London Transport Users' Committee.**
- **Transport for London.**
- **The London Development Agency.**
- **The Commission for New Towns (housing matters only).**
- **English Partnerships (some housing and planning matters only).**
- **The Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Authority.**
- **The Environment Agency (flood defence and land drainage matters only).**

4 What can't we investigate?

There are some things we cannot investigate, mainly when there is a more appropriate organisation to deal with them. But the law is complex on this. If you are in doubt, send us your complaint and we will tell you whether we can deal with it. Or you can phone our **Adviceline on Lo-call 0845 602 1983** or look at our website.

5 What does the Ombudsman look for?

The law says the Ombudsman must look for 'maladministration' by a council that has caused you 'injustice'. This means something that the council has done wrong, or failed to do, that directly affected you. But we cannot question whether a council's decision or action is right or wrong simply because you disagree with it, and we may not investigate your complaint if we decide that the injustice is only slight.

6 How do you complain to the Local Government Ombudsman?

Please send your complaint to the Ombudsman for your area.

You can use the form in the centre of this leaflet. There are notes on **pages 4-5** to help you use it. Or you can write a letter including all the points covered in the form. Complaints must be in writing. If this is difficult, ask someone to help you, for example your local Citizens Advice Bureau or a councillor. If you cannot write your complaint in English, we can arrange to have it translated.

You may get someone to complain for you (for example, a friend, relative or solicitor) as long as they have your permission to represent you. But, if you employ a professional person, such as a solicitor, we will only ask the council to pay the fee in exceptional circumstances. This is because people do not usually need a professional to put a complaint to us. However, you may be eligible for help from a solicitor or some advice agencies through the Legal Services Commission's Legal Help Scheme.

If you have any documents to support your complaint, such as letters from the council, please send them with your complaint. You may want to send us photocopies instead. Please let us know if you would like us to return them to you.

We will usually send a copy of your complaint to the council concerned.

7 What happens next?

When we have received your complaint, we will usually write to acknowledge it within five working days, explaining what will happen next. If you do not hear from us within that time, please telephone the office where you sent the complaint.

8 What other ombudsmen are there?

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

Phone: 0870 011 5378

Who deals with complaints in Scotland about both local and central government, housing associations and the National Health Service.

Welsh Local Government Ombudsman

Phone: 01656 661325

Who deals with complaints about local government in Wales.

Parliamentary Ombudsman

Phone: 0845 015 4033

Who investigates complaints about central government departments, agencies and certain other organisations.

Health Service Ombudsman

Phone: 0845 015 4033

Who investigates complaints about the National Health Service.

Independent Housing Ombudsman

Phone: 0845 712 5973

Who investigates complaints about housing associations, housing companies and some other private landlords, but **not** complaints about council housing.

In addition, there are other ombudsmen who deal with other types of complaint. The **British and Irish Ombudsman Association** can give you details (phone: 020 8467 7455 or see its website, www.bioa.org.uk).

For bulk orders of this leaflet, please phone **020 7217 4620** or use the publications order form on our website (www.lgo.org.uk/pubsorder.htm).



Notes to help you fill in the complaint form

1 How to make your complaint

Please fill in the complaint form as fully and clearly as you can. You can ask someone to help you, such as a Citizens Advice Bureau or a friend or relative. If you prefer, you can write a letter instead of filling in the form. If you do that, then please give us the same information that we ask for on the form. It will also be helpful if you send us copies of any letters or documents about your complaint.

At all our offices, we welcome calls from textphone users using Typetalk.

If you need more advice or help on how to make your complaint, please phone the **Adviceline on Lo-call 0845 602 1983**, or you can look at our website, **www.lgo.org.uk**

2 When to make your complaint

You should complain to us within 12 months of when you first knew about the matter you are complaining about. If you leave it later, we may not be able to help.

3 Daytime contact number

Please put in the telephone number where we can contact you between 9am and 5pm. Tell us if it is your home or work, or the number of a neighbour or friend. If you do not have a daytime contact number, please put down a number that has an answerphone where we can leave a message during the day. If you do not have any of these, please leave this section blank.

4 Council or authority

Under 'Which council or authority are you complaining about?' please write the name of the organisation you want to complain about. It might not be a council. The list of organisations and authorities that we can deal with is on **page 3**.

5 Have you complained to the council?

In most cases, before we can investigate a complaint, **the council must have a chance to answer it**. If you have not complained to the council, please do so. You can find out how to complain from the council's offices or you can ask a councillor to help.

If you are not satisfied with the answer, or if the council does not give you an answer within a reasonable time, you can complain to the Ombudsman for your area.



In some urgent cases, including education admission appeals, we may be able to deal with your complaint straight away.

6 Where to send the form

There are three Local Government Ombudsmen in England. Please send your complaint and the attached monitoring form to the office of the Ombudsman who deals with your area.

Don't worry if you send your complaint to the wrong office. We will pass it to the correct one straight away.

- **For complaints about London boroughs north of the river Thames (including Richmond but not Harrow or Tower Hamlets), Essex, Kent, East Sussex, West Sussex, Surrey, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire, Suffolk and Coventry City:**

Tony Redmond

Local Government Ombudsman
10th Floor, Millbank Tower
Millbank

London SW1P 4QP

Phone: 020 7217 4620

Fax: 020 7217 4621

Email: enquiries.london@lgo.org.uk

- **For complaints about the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, Birmingham City, Cheshire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire and the north of England (except the cities of York and Lancaster):**

Patricia Thomas

Local Government Ombudsman
Beverley House
17 Shipton Road
York YO30 5FZ

Phone: 01904 380200

Fax: 01904 380269

Email: enquiries.york@lgo.org.uk

- **For complaints about London boroughs south of the river Thames (except Richmond) and Harrow; the cities of York and Lancaster; and the rest of England not included in the areas of Mr Redmond and Mrs Thomas:**

Jerry White

Local Government Ombudsman
The Oaks No 2
Westwood Way
Westwood Business Park

Coventry CV4 8JB

Phone: 024 7682 0000

Fax: 024 7682 0001

Email: enquiries.coventry@lgo.org.uk



www.lgo.org.uk

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