



# 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](http://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 0845 602 1983**.

(Please note that calls may be recorded for training and quality purposes.)

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. 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 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](http://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 the council has got them wrong and if this has affected you directly.

In our investigations:

- **we do not take sides;**
- **our service is free; and**
- **we respect your privacy – although we have to give a copy of your complaint to the council.**

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 0845 602 1983\***.

## 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 0845 602 1983\***.

\* Please note that calls may be recorded for training and quality purposes.

### 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.**
- **Joint boards of local authorities.**
- **National park authorities.**
- **Fire authorities.**
- **Police authorities (but not about the investigation or prevention of crime).**
- **Internal drainage boards.**
- **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.**
- **Stonebridge Housing Action Trust.**
- **The Environment Agency (flood defence and land drainage matters only).**

### 4 What can't we investigate?

There are some things we may not investigate, such as when there is a more appropriate organisation to deal with your complaint or if we don't have the power to do so. 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 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 has 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, using the form in the centre of this leaflet or via our website ([www.lgo.org.uk/complain.htm](http://www.lgo.org.uk/complain.htm)).

There are notes on **pages 4-5** to help you use the form. 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

**Website:** [www.scottishombudsman.org.uk](http://www.scottishombudsman.org.uk)

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

### **Public Services Ombudsman for Wales**

Phone: 01656 641150

**Website:** [www.ombudsman-wales.org.uk](http://www.ombudsman-wales.org.uk)

Who investigates complaints about local government and National Health Services organisations including GPs in Wales; the National Assembly for Wales and many of the public bodies which it funds; and housing associations in Wales.

### **Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman**

Phone: 0845 015 4033

**Website:** [www.ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.ombudsman.org.uk)

Who investigates complaints about central government departments, agencies, the National Health Service and certain other organisations.

### **Housing Ombudsman Service**

Phone: 0845 712 5973

**Website:** [www.ihos.org.uk](http://www.ihos.org.uk)

Who investigates complaints about registered social landlords and some private landlords and management agents, but **not** complaints about council housing.

In addition, there are ombudsmen who deal with other types of complaint.

The **British and Irish Ombudsman Association** can give you details (phone: 020 8894 9272 or see its website, [www.bioa.org.uk](http://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](http://www.lgo.org.uk/pubsorder.htm)).

### **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.**



# 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, 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.

You can also fill in the complaint form online. Go to [www.lgo.org.uk/complaint\\_form.htm](http://www.lgo.org.uk/complaint_form.htm), where you can complete the form directly on screen, or download the form as a Word document and email it to us at [enquiries@lgo.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@lgo.org.uk). (Please note that you cannot send attachments if you complete the on-screen form.)

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 **0845 602 1983\***. If you have real difficulty filling in the form yourself and cannot get help, our advice staff can take down your complaint over the telephone.

More background information, including summaries of our reports

on cases, and all our publications are available on our website, [www.lgo.org.uk](http://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**.

\* Please note that calls may be recorded for training and quality purposes.

## 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. (There is further information about education admission appeal complaints on our website at [www.lgo.org.uk/complain.htm](http://www.lgo.org.uk/complain.htm))

## 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@lgo.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@lgo.org.uk)

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

### **Anne Seex**

Local Government Ombudsman  
Beverley House  
17 Shipton Road  
York YO30 5FZ  
**Phone:** 01904 380200  
**Fax:** 01904 380269  
**Email:** [enquiries@lgo.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@lgo.org.uk)

- **For complaints about London boroughs south of the river Thames (except Richmond) and Harrow; the cities of Lancaster, Manchester and York; and the rest of England not included in the areas of Tony Redmond and Anne Seex.**

### **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@lgo.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@lgo.org.uk)





[www.lgo.org.uk](http://www.lgo.org.uk)

Adviceline: 0845 602 1983