

Alternatives to Court

Dealing with problems without
going to court



A free and confidential service paid for by legal aid
0845 345 4 345 www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk

community
legal advice

Going to court to solve a problem can be expensive, stressful and time-consuming. But there are other ways of dealing with many types of complaint. This leaflet explains how they work and when you can use them.

● What alternatives are there to court?	3
● Do I need a lawyer to use alternative dispute resolution?	4
● How do I decide whether to use an alternative dispute resolution scheme?	4
● How do alternative dispute resolution schemes work?	6
● Mediation and conciliation	6
● Adjudication and arbitration	9
● Grievance and complaints procedures	10
● Litigation	11
● Negotiation	11
● Ombudsmen	12
● How much does alternative dispute resolution cost?	16
● Dispute resolution services	18

The leaflets in this series give you an outline of your legal rights. They are not a complete guide to the law and are not intended to be a guide to how the law will apply to you or to any specific situation. The leaflets are regularly updated but the law may have changed since this was printed, so information in it may be incorrect or out of date.

If you have a problem, you will need to get more information or personal advice to work out the best way to solve it. See 'Further help' on page 21 for sources of information and advice.

What alternatives are there to court?

Until recently, if you had a legal problem, you would normally have to go to court or a tribunal in what is often called 'litigation'. This is still a common way of sorting out such problems. But going to court can be expensive and off-putting.

Now there are alternative ways of sorting out disputes caused by breakdowns in relationships, complaints and legal problems. Together they are often called 'alternative dispute resolution' (ADR) and include things like arbitration, mediation and ombudsman schemes. With most problems, courts encourage people to consider these sorts of schemes before they use litigation.

This leaflet explains how the different schemes work, and when you can use them. If you have a problem, you need to read this leaflet alongside one of the other Community Legal Advice leaflets in this series, which look in more detail at different types of problem. See the back cover for a list of all the leaflets in this series.

Why use an alternative dispute resolution scheme instead of going to court?

ADR schemes are not meant to replace the courts in all cases. But they can have advantages over going to court. These advantages include:

- being more flexible;
- solving your problem faster;
- being less stressful; and
- costing you less money.

If you have a problem with a person or organisation you deal with regularly (a neighbour, for example), ADR can lead to a better, longer-lasting solution to your problem. It may also lead to better communication with them in the future.

You can use some ADR schemes as well as going to court or a tribunal. For example, mediation can help everyone focus on the issues that are causing the problem, making it easier for you to reach an agreement or for a judge to make a decision.

Remember that either side in a disagreement can suggest using an ADR scheme to solve the problem.

Court rules also now say that you must think about whether some form of ADR would be a better way to reach an agreement before you go to court. If

you refuse without good reason to try ADR before going to court, you may not get your court costs back, even if you win your case.

Do I need a lawyer to use alternative dispute resolution?

Just as you would seek advice when going to court, you should in most cases seek advice when choosing an ADR method and when reaching agreements. Advice can also be useful when you are writing a complaint letter or using a formal complaints procedure.

You can get independent advice from various sources, for example a:

- Citizens Advice Bureau;
- housing advice centre;
- local Law Centre; or
- solicitor.

See pages 18 to 22 for contact details of other organisations that can offer advice.

How do I decide whether to use an alternative dispute resolution scheme?

How you choose to solve your problem depends on:

- the result you want;
- what you can expect to achieve;

- how you want to go about solving your problem; and
- how willing the other side is to try and solve the problem.

The result you want

You can get different things from going to court than from ADR. By going to court, you might get:

- an order that something be done or stopped;
- compensation; or
- a judgment from the court about who is right and who is wrong.

By using ADR, you might get:

- a change in the way a person or organisation behaves;
- a promise that a person or company won't do something;
- something you own repaired;
- something you own replaced;
- an apology;
- an explanation for what happened to you;
- a mistake corrected; or
- compensation (for example, for an injury).

What you can expect to achieve

What you want to achieve may not be

possible for your particular problem, and it's important to know this before starting out. For example, you might want to use mediation to get a full explanation of what went wrong. But if the other side isn't willing to take part in mediation, this won't be possible.

Another important factor is identifying who the other side is – who is responsible for what happened. In some cases this is straightforward. But in others (some consumer disagreements, for example), it can be difficult to identify the person who gave you the service or made the decision, and the person who is legally responsible.

In cases of discrimination at work, for example, employers are often responsible for what their employees do. In the case of a complaint about neighbour nuisance the neighbour or the landlord might be the right person to approach. If you are not sure who is responsible, an adviser should be able to help you.

You will need to find out if the ADR service can produce the result you want. For example, if you have been injured during medical treatment and your main priority is to get compensation, you will probably need to take legal action, because you are unlikely to get compensation through

the NHS complaints procedure or the Health Service Ombudsman. But if you feel that alerting people to the problem is the most important thing, so that it doesn't happen to someone else, then you will have a better chance of getting this from the Health Service Ombudsman.

How you want to solve your problem

No single form of dispute resolution can give you everything you want. The result is only one thing to think about; how the problem is resolved can be just as important. Things to think about include:

- what it will take to get your problem sorted out;
- how much it will cost;
- how it will affect your life, including your family and your work; and
- how much time you can spend on it.

For example, you might feel it is important to have a meeting where you can state your case in person. Mediation can usually offer this. Or you might feel that you don't want to go to a meeting but would rather have the matter dealt with on paper only (through letters and other written information). Ombudsman schemes normally use this kind of 'documents-only' process. On the other hand, you

may feel you need a more formal hearing where someone independent decides the rights and wrongs of your case. A court, a tribunal or an arbitrator can offer this.

When thinking about your options, remember to take into account your own costs and expenses, such as travel, childcare and time off work.

The time it takes to use an ADR process can be a major factor. Some matters are very urgent and important, and going to court is the only safe option (for example, if you are in danger of losing your home). You can, however, follow up court action with another process such as mediation to deal with other parts of a problem, or perhaps to discuss the solution in more detail.

Other things to think about

Remember that some methods have to be the last thing you try, not the first. This is because those methods are 'binding' (which means that both sides, or sometimes just one side, must do what they are told or agree to). If you use a binding method, you can't go on to use a different method if you are unhappy with the result.

Also, in some cases, you can't use two methods at the same time. For example, you cannot take your problem to court and to an

ombudsman at the same time.

Remember that for some types of problem there is a time limit for taking a case to court or to another dispute resolution process. So if you are using one process, you need to be sure that it will not put you beyond the time limit for taking your case elsewhere if you need to. For example, this is particularly important in employment disputes.

How do alternative dispute resolution schemes work?

There are many different types of ADR scheme. The one (or ones) you choose to use will depend on:

- how you want your problem dealt with; and
- what sort of problem you have – not all methods are available for every kind of problem.

How different types of scheme work is explained on the following pages.

Contact details for the main dispute resolution services are given on pages 18 to 20.

Mediation and conciliation

Mediation and conciliation are basically the same, though both names are used. These involve an independent mediator (someone who doesn't take sides and who won't gain or lose anything by the

outcome). They will help you and the other person or company find a solution to the problem. The people involved in the dispute, not the mediator, decide what will happen and the terms of any agreement. But the process is voluntary so you cannot force the other person or organisation to take part.

Mediation and conciliation themselves are not binding, and what is said in mediation or conciliation is confidential, so it cannot be used in court later unless both sides agree that it can. People tend to keep to an agreement reached through mediation or conciliation, because they have prepared its terms themselves. However, if you want, you can ask the court to turn an agreement you make in mediation and conciliation into a 'consent order', which can be enforced through the court.

You can use mediation and conciliation for a range of different problems.

Mediation for relationship and family problems

All problems to do with a divorce or separation can go to family mediation. These include:

- arrangements for children, including where they will live, who they will live with, and how often they will see each parent;

- what will happen to your home, money and belongings;
- how your ex-partner or children will be supported; and
- how and when you will contact your ex-partner.

Some mediation services can also deal with other types of problems within families, including:

- problems between young people and their parents; and
- disagreements over who will care for elderly parents and how they will be cared for.

You can find a family mediator or mediation service near you from Community Legal Advice (see 'Further help' on page 21), or from the Family Mediation Helpline (see page 18). There is also more information in the Community Legal Advice leaflet, 'Family Mediation'.

Mediation for problems with neighbours

If you have a disagreement with a neighbour, for example about noise or harassment, you can try to sort it out using community mediation (see page 18 for how to find mediation services in your area). Community mediation is usually free to local residents. The issues community mediation can deal with include:

- noise;
- problems with local children;
- problems over shared land or facilities;
- parking;
- pets; and
- property boundaries.

For more information see the Community Legal Advice leaflet, 'Neighbourhood and Community Disputes'.

Mediation and conciliation for problems at work

You can try to solve many employment disagreements through mediation or conciliation, including problems to do with:

- unfair dismissal;
- equal pay;
- redundancy payments;
- terms and conditions of your job;
- requests for flexible working; and
- discrimination because of pregnancy, race, sex or a disability.

Workplace mediation is offered by some community mediation services, and by civil and commercial mediation providers (see page 18 for details of how to contact them).

The organisation Acas offers:

- face-to-face mediation (for a fee); and
- free conciliation over the phone for many types of employment problem, if you have applied to an employment tribunal to deal with your dispute.

Remember that there will be strict time limits if you want to take your case to an employment tribunal. These time limits will apply whether or not you try mediation, conciliation or negotiation first. It is important to get independent legal advice about your situation before deciding what to do.

Mediation and conciliation for problems with discrimination if you are disabled

If you have a disability and you feel you have been discriminated against by a retailer, a service provider, or a school or other education provider, you may be able to use the Disability Conciliation Service. Contact the Equality and Human Rights Commission for advice or referral to the scheme (see 'Further help' on page 21).

If you feel you have been treated less favourably at work because of a disability, your sex or your race, you can consider using conciliation or mediation provided by Acas.

Harassment and discrimination claims

at work or between neighbours can also be sorted out using mediation (see page 18 for how to find mediation services in your area).

Mediation for problems with your child's education

You may be able to use a mediation service to help sort out a problem about:

- how or why your child was excluded from school; or
- special educational needs that you feel your child has.

All local education authorities (LEAs) are required to provide 'independent disagreement resolution services' for disputes about a school's provision for a child's special educational needs; in most cases the type of disagreement resolution used is mediation. Your child's school or LEA can give you details of your local service.

Mediation for other problems

You may be able to use mediation for a range of other problems, including:

- problems with goods and services;
- business disagreements;
- medical accidents;
- personal injury;
- community care; and
- housing.

Adjudication and arbitration

Adjudication and arbitration are sometimes described as a private version of going to court. They involve an independent adjudicator or arbitrator who is impartial (someone who doesn't take sides, and who won't gain or lose anything by the outcome), who hears both sides of the disagreement and makes a decision that will solve the problem.

You and the other person or company must both agree if you want to use adjudication or arbitration.

The process is confidential and so is any amount of compensation that is awarded. Sometimes the adjudicator or arbitrator makes their decision based on papers that each person gives them to support their case. At other times they hold a hearing where both sides can present their case. However, this is usually less formal than a court hearing.

Adjudication is a less formal process than arbitration. Adjudication is not usually binding on the person making the complaint, so you can take your case to court if you do not agree with the adjudicator's decision. Arbitration is binding on both sides, so you can't take your case to court after the arbitrator has made a decision, unless they have made obvious legal mistakes or behaved improperly.

Adjudication and arbitration can be used for a range of problems, including tenancy deposit disputes and complaints about goods and services.

Trade associations often have adjudication or arbitration schemes for dealing with disputes between consumers and organisations that are members of the association. Some associations run their own schemes, but many are run by an independent organisation called the Independent Dispute Resolution Service (IDRS). One example of a trade association with an IDRS scheme is the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA), which can arbitrate on, for example, a disagreement about a holiday.

Under a new law, tenants now have access to adjudication in disputes with landlords about return of deposits. From April 2007 all landlords and letting agents have to belong to a government-authorized scheme that protects tenants' deposits and provides free adjudication if there is a dispute about the deposit at the end of the tenancy (see page 19 for details of schemes).

If you have a dispute with a business, check whether they are a member of a trade association. If they are, ask the trade association whether they have

an adjudication or arbitration scheme to deal with your problem. You can also contact IDRS to see which organisations they run schemes for. (See page 19 for contact details.)

Grievance and complaints procedures

These are usually the first stage of resolution for many disagreements with companies or government departments. In some cases, you can use another method of sorting out a problem (such as an ombudsman) only if you have gone through the complaints procedure first.

The best complaints procedures are usually those where complaints are handled at a local level, often informally. This can be easier for everyone. However, many complaints procedures do not have time limits, so sorting out a problem can take a long time. Also, complaints procedures are not independent, because they are drawn up and handled by the organisation you are complaining about.

If you are frustrated by a complaints procedure and feel you have done everything possible to sort out the problem by using it, then find out what the next stage is. This is often an ombudsman.

Litigation

Litigation (taking a case to a court or tribunal) often ends in a settlement (agreement) before the final hearing. However, if a settlement can't be reached, an independent person or a group of people (for example, a judge, referee or tribunal) hears arguments from both sides and then makes a judgment. Unlike most alternative dispute resolution processes, in litigation the decision is made public and hearings can often be reported on (and even watched by the public). You can sometimes appeal against a judgment made through litigation, though this depends on the type of litigation and the reason for your appeal.

Litigation can be used for a range of problems. Two examples are using the 'small claims track' for problems with goods and services and an employment tribunal for problems at work.

Litigation for problems with goods and services

For most consumer complaints, you can use the 'small claims track'. This is a way of dealing with small claims (for less than £5,000) through the courts. The procedure is informal and you are normally expected to put your own case. If you use a lawyer, you won't be able to recover their costs.

For more about dealing with consumer problems, see the Community Legal Advice leaflet 'Problems with Goods and Services'.

Litigation for problems at work

If you have a problem at work, you could try and sort it out using Acas conciliation or mediation (see 'Mediation for problems at work' on page 8). If that doesn't work, you can go to an employment tribunal. However, a tribunal can only:

- make your employer pay you compensation; or
- recommend (but not force) your employer to give you your job back if you have lost it.

Acas can tell you and your employer your legal rights and give you a view of what you could expect to happen at an employment tribunal hearing. But remember that there are strict time limits for using an employment tribunal, and these apply whether or not you try conciliation or mediation first. See the Community Legal Advice leaflet 'Employment' for details.

Negotiation

This involves dealing directly with the person or organisation that seems to have caused the problem. You can do this yourself, or you can get a

representative (such as an adviser or solicitor) to do it for you.

Negotiation is usually a good first step. It starts with you approaching the other side with details of your complaint and suggestions for how it can be sorted out. The other side does not need to agree to take part before you (or your representative) approach them.

The process is not binding, although both sides can agree to make a negotiated agreement into a legally binding contract or order. This contract or order would mean that you could then take the other side to court if they didn't do what they had agreed to. In some types of dispute, such as medical negligence and housing disrepair, the courts say you must try to negotiate with the other party before applying to court.

Most disagreements can be solved through negotiation. A common example is settlement discussions between solicitors. More than nine out of ten legal claims are settled without a court hearing.

Negotiation is different from conciliation and mediation in that the person negotiating for you:

- acts for you, and represents your interests;
- is not independent; and

- may also advise you about the best course of action.

Ombudsmen

Ombudsmen are independent 'referees' who look at complaints about public and private organisations. They are often a last resort when complaints cannot be sorted out through an organisation's own complaints procedure.

Ombudsman services:

- are free to use;
- will normally consider your complaint only after you have used the complaints procedure of the organisation you have a problem with;
- don't take sides; and
- make decisions that are not binding on you, so you are free to go to court or use another dispute resolution process if you are not happy with their decision (except for the Pensions Ombudsman, whose decisions are binding on both you and the company).

Ombudsmen who belong to the British and Irish Ombudsman Association (BIOA) are independent from the organisations they investigate. See 'Ombudsmen' on page 19 for details of how to contact the schemes listed below.

In most cases, the ombudsmen dealing with public organisations (such as local authorities or government departments) can only review how a decision was made and say whether:

- there was 'maladministration' in the way it was made; and
- it resulted in an injustice.

They don't look at whether or not the decision itself was right.

Maladministration can include:

- an organisation or department not following its own policies or procedures;
- rudeness;
- taking too long to do something;
- not doing something they should have;
- treating you less fairly than other people; and
- giving you wrong or misleading information.

The private-sector ombudsmen (who look at complaints about banks and insurance companies, for example) can generally look at whether a decision was fair and reasonable based on industry standards of good practice. They can also award you compensation if they agree with your complaint.

Ombudsmen for problems with goods and services

There are ombudsman schemes for a range of different consumer complaints, including complaints about:

- estate agents;
- financial services (banks, investments and insurance, for example);
- pensions; and
- phone services.

If a company is a member of an ombudsman scheme, it should make this clear, for example in a brochure or on its letterhead. If you are not sure, ask the company or contact the BIOA – see page 19 for details of how to contact them.

Ombudsman for problems with solicitors

If you make a complaint to a solicitor and you are not happy with the way they deal with it, you can complain to the Legal Complaints Service (LCS). If you are unhappy with how the LCS has handled your complaint, you can then go to the Legal Services Ombudsman.

Ombudsman for problems with medical treatment

If you have a complaint about treatment you've received from the NHS, you can take your case to the Health Service Ombudsman. However, the ombudsman will look at your case only if you have already been through the NHS complaints procedure and you are not happy with the result.

The Health Service Ombudsman can consider various complaints, including those about:

- poor-quality care or treatment;
- poor service;
- not giving you a service that you should have had;
- a delay in your care or treatment;
- rudeness; and
- the way a hospital or health authority dealt with your complaint.

Ombudsmen for problems with housing

The Housing Ombudsman Service deals with complaints from people who have a 'registered social landlord'. These are normally housing associations, but may also be landlords who manage homes that used to be run by local councils. Some private landlords are also members of the Housing Ombudsman scheme. The Local Government Ombudsman deals with complaints from tenants in local authority housing.

Ombudsman for problems with local authorities (councils)

If you have a complaint about a local authority (council) you should contact the Local Government Ombudsman.

They will look at complaints about most services provided by your local authority, including:

- council housing transfers, allocations and repairs;
- problems with your child's education (for example, not being given a place at a school; being excluded; or being assessed for special educational needs);
- social services;
- housing benefit;
- council tax; and
- planning.

Ombudsmen for problems with government departments

If you have a complaint about a government department, you can take it to the Parliamentary Ombudsman. If your complaint is about the National Assembly for Wales or some public organisations concerned with Welsh issues, you can take it to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales. The Parliamentary Ombudsman will look at a range of complaints, including those about:

- the Benefits Agency or Jobcentre Plus;
- HM Revenue and Customs; and
- the courts (but not about judges or their decisions).

You can find out which government departments and public bodies are covered at the website www.ombudsman.org.uk.

If you want to take your complaint to the Parliamentary Ombudsman, you must first send it to a member of parliament (MP). The MP will pass it on to the ombudsman. In Wales, you complain directly to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

Ombudsman for problems with the Child Support Agency

If you have a complaint about the Child Support Agency, you can take it

to the Independent Case Examiner (ICE). If you are unhappy with the result of the ICE's investigation, you can complain to the Parliamentary Ombudsman.

Ombudsman for complaints about the use of information

The Information Commissioner's Office can deal with complaints about:

- the way your personal information is used by an organisation (for example, if you believe it has passed on your details without your permission); or
- the way a public body (a government department, for example) has responded to a freedom-of-information request.

Complaints about gas, electricity, water and telephone companies

Regulators oversee the way gas, electricity, water and telephone companies behave. The three main regulators in England and Wales are:

- Ofgem for gas and electricity companies;
- Ofwat for water companies; and
- Ofcom for telephone and internet service providers.

However, regulators do not normally deal with individual consumer

complaints. If you have a complaint about a gas, electricity, water or telephone company, you should first complain to the company direct. If you are not satisfied with the way the company has dealt with your complaint, you can take it to one of the independent consumer complaints bodies:

- For a gas or electricity company, contact Energywatch.
- For a water company, contact the Consumer Council for Water.
- For a phone company or internet service provider, there are two complaints bodies: CISAS (the Communications and Internet Services Adjudication Scheme) and Otelco (the Office of the Telecommunications Ombudsman). You should contact the one your phone company or internet service provider is a member of.

See 'Complaints about utilities providers' on page 20 for details of how to contact them.

How much does alternative dispute resolution cost?

When working out how much it will cost to deal with a problem, you need to take into account:

- fees or charges for the alternative

dispute resolution service (unless it is free);

- your own expenses, including things like travel and photocopying;
- the cost of legal help and advice; and
- the risk of not getting what you want.

For example, you need to know if you will be responsible for paying the other side's legal fees and other expenses if you lose. And you need to know if you can expect to get your costs and expenses paid if you win.

The general principle that applies in civil courts in England and Wales is that the 'loser' pays the other side's costs as well as their own, except in the family courts and the small claims courts, where each side normally pays their own costs. In alternative dispute resolution, the general principle is that each side pays their own costs.

You should also be aware that if you unreasonably refuse to consider a form of ADR before or during civil litigation, then you may not get your legal costs back even if you win.

Mediation costs can vary, depending on the type of mediation. For example:

- community mediation is usually free to local residents;

- family mediation services often charge an hourly rate. Some have a scale of fees, so what you pay depends on how much money you have;
- commercial mediation providers charge according to the complexity and value of the claim;
- many county courts in England and Wales provide free small-claims mediation for people who have an existing claim in court; and
- mediators through the National Mediation Helpline will provide half a day of mediation for £250 plus VAT per party.

If you are eligible for legal aid, the Community Legal Advice fund will pay for the cost of your mediation or other form of alternative dispute resolution.

Sometimes, the organisation you are complaining about pays all the costs because they are the financially stronger side.

Most consumer arbitration schemes run by IDRS cost between £10 and £100, but some are free. And if you win your case, you will get back any fee you have paid.

Ombudsman schemes tend to be the least expensive to use, as they are free to the person complaining.

Community mediation doesn't cost much either. It usually involves face-to-face meetings, so you may have to pay travel and other expenses, but you may be able to get these back as part of a mediated agreement if both sides agree to this.

You may have to pay for travel expenses, childcare costs, and time off work if you have to go to a hearing. Photocopying evidence can be expensive, so don't forget this cost if you are using a process such as arbitration where you have to provide many documents.

Can I get help with the costs?

You may be able to get help with the costs of using an ADR scheme if you are eligible for legal aid. This will depend on whether you can afford to pay and if you meet other conditions. If you meet these conditions, you may get help with:

- the costs of preparing your case for mediation or arbitration;
- the cost of legal advice before and during ADR;
- the fee for mediation or arbitration.

See Community Legal Advice on page 21 for how to find out more about legal aid.

Dispute resolution services

Mediation for relationship and family problems

The Family Mediation Helpline

For details of family mediation providers in your area.
phone: 0845 60 26 627
www.familymediationhelpline.co.uk

Mediation for problems with neighbours

You can find your nearest community mediation service through an internet search, or by asking your local council for a list of local mediation providers.

Mediation for problems at work

Acas

Provides conciliation, arbitration and mediation in employment disputes.
phone: 08457 474747
www.acas.org.uk

Mediation for problems with discrimination if you are disabled

Disability Conciliation Service

Phone the Equality and Human Rights Commission for information and a referral.
In England: 08457 622 633
In Wales: 0845 604 8810

Mediation for other problems

AIMS (the Advice, Information and Mediation Service) is run by Age Concern and offers advice and mediation for problems with sheltered and retirement housing.
phone: 0845 600 2001
www.ageconcern.org.uk/AgeConcern/aims.asp

Mediation in disputes about special educational needs provision, or school exclusions, is often provided by independent local family or community mediation services. Your school or local education authority should be able to give you contact details.

The National Mediation Helpline

The National Mediation Helpline can

answer general enquiries relating to mediation and put you in contact with accredited mediation providers.

phone: 0845 60 30 809

www.nationalmediationhelpline.com

Adjudication and arbitration providers

The Independent Dispute Resolution Service (IDRS) provides adjudication and arbitration schemes for a range of trade associations.

phone: 020 7520 3800

www.idrs.ltd.uk

Adjudication for problems with tenancy deposits

There are three government-authorised schemes providing adjudication for tenancy deposit disputes. Landlords and letting agents must be a member of one of these schemes.

The Deposit Protection Service

phone: 0870 7071 707

www.depositprotection.com

Tenancy Deposit Solutions

phone: 0871 703 0552

www.mydeposits.co.uk

The Dispute Service

phone: 0845 226 7837

www.thedisputeservice.co.uk

Ombudsmen

British and Irish Ombudsman Association

For information about public and private sector ombudsman schemes in the UK and Ireland, with contact details.

phone: 020 8894 9272

www.bioa.org.uk

Estate Agents Ombudsman

For complaints about estate agents who are members of the scheme.

phone: 01722 333 306

www.oea.co.uk

The Financial Ombudsman Service

For complaints about financial services, including banks, building societies, investments and insurance.

phone: 0845 080 1800

www.financial-ombudsman.org.uk

Health Service Ombudsman

For complaints about services provided through the NHS in England.

phone: 0845 015 4033

www.ombudsman.org.uk

Housing Ombudsman Service

For complaints about housing provided by all registered social landlords, and some private landlords.

phone: 0845 7125 973

www.ihos.org.uk

The Independent Case Examiner

For complaints about the Child Support Agency.

phone: 0845 606 0777

Typetalk: 18002 0151 801 8800

www.ind-case-exam.org.uk

The Information Commissioner's Office

For complaints about data protection and freedom of information.

phone: 0845 630 60 60

www.ico.gov.uk

Legal Services Ombudsman

For complaints about the way the Law Society, Bar Council and other professional bodies deal with complaints about legal practitioners.

phone: 0845 601 0794

www.olso.org

Local Government Ombudsman

For complaints about services provided by local authorities in England.

phone: 0845 602 1983

www.lgo.org.uk

Parliamentary Ombudsman

For complaints about services provided by government departments in England.

phone: 0845 015 4033

www.ombudsman.org.uk

Pensions Ombudsman

For complaints about the way pensions schemes are run.

phone: 020 7834 9144

www.pensions-ombudsman.org.uk

Public Services Ombudsman for Wales

For complaints about local authorities, registered social landlords, the national health services, and the National Assembly for Wales and the bodies it funds.

phone: 01656 641 150

www.ombudsman-wales.org

Complaints about utilities providers

Energywatch

phone: 0845 906 0708

www.energywatch.org.uk

The Consumer Council for Water

phone: 0845 039 2837

www.ccwater.org.uk

Communications and Internet Services Adjudication Scheme (CISAS)

phone: 020 7520 3827

www.cisas.org.uk

Office of the Telecommunications Ombudsman (Otel)

phone: 0845 050 1614

www.otel.org.uk

Further help

Community Legal Advice

Provides free information direct to the public on a range of common legal problems.

Call 0845 345 4 345

If you qualify for legal aid, get free advice from a specialist legal adviser about benefits and tax credits, debt, education, employment or housing. Also find a high quality local legal adviser or solicitor.

Click

www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk

Find a high quality local legal adviser or solicitor, link to other online information and see if you qualify for legal aid using our calculator.

ADRnow

For more information about all kinds of alternative dispute resolution processes, and links to mediation providers and ombudsman schemes throughout the UK.

www.adrnow.org.uk

Advicenow

Information on rights and legal issues.

www.advicenow.org.uk

Adviceuk

Umbrella group for free, independent advice centres.

www.adviceuk.org.uk

Citizens Advice

Your local Citizens Advice Bureau is listed in the phone book, or you can search for a local CAB on:
www.citizensadvice.org.uk/cabdir.ihtml

Consumer Direct

Advice and information on consumer problems.

phone: 08454 04 05 06

www.consumerdirect.gov.uk

DIAL UK

A network of advice centres for people with disabilities.

www.dialuk.info/

Equality and Human Rights Commission In England

Disability Helpline phone:

08457 622 633

textphone: 08457 622 644

Helpline for other types of

discrimination phone: 0845 604 6610

textphone 0845 604 6620

In Wales

Helpline phone: 0845 604 8810

textphone 0845 604 8820

www.equalityhumanrights.com

Law Centres Federation

www.lawcentres.org.uk

The Law Society

phone: 020 7242 1222

www.lawsociety.org.uk

Office of Fair Trading

www.oft.gov.uk

Consumer Direct advice service:

phone 08454 04 05 06

Resolution

A group of solicitors specialising in family problems who use a non-confrontational approach.

phone: 01689 820272

www.resolution.org.uk

Shelter

For problems with housing.

phone: 0808 800 4444 (helpline 8am to midnight)

www.shelter.org.uk

Youth Access

Information, advice and counselling for young people.

phone: 020 8772 9900

www.youthaccess.org.uk

The Community Legal Service

The Community Legal Service has been set up to help you find the right legal information and advice to solve your problems.

You can get help through a national network of organisations including Citizens Advice Bureaux, Law Centres, many independent advice centres and thousands of high street solicitors. All of these services meet quality standards set by the Legal Services Commission. Look for the Community Legal Service logo, shown below.

Many of the organisations offer some or all of their services for free. If you cannot afford to pay for advice you may be eligible for financial support through the Community Legal Service Fund (Legal Aid). You can order leaflets about funding from the LSC leaflet line on 0845 3000 343. You can also use a Legal Aid eligibility calculator on the website: www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk.

*Community
Legal Service*



The Legal Services Commission (LSC)

The Community Legal Service and the Community Legal Service Fund are managed by the Legal Services Commission. To find out more about us, visit our website at www.legalservices.gov.uk or find the details for your local Legal Services Commission office in the phone book.

legal services
COMMISSION

The leaflets are also available online at: www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk

- 1 Dealing with Debt
- 2 Employment
- 3 Divorce and Separation
- 4 Renting and Letting
- 5 Buying and Selling Property
- 6 Losing your Home
- 7 The Human Rights Act
- 8 Claiming Asylum
- 9 Welfare Benefits
- 10 Wills and Probate
- 11 Dealing with the Police
- 12 No-win, No-fee Actions
- 13 Problems with Goods and Services
- 14 Medical Accidents
- 15 Equal Opportunities
- 16 Racial Discrimination
- 17 Personal Injury
- 18 Rights for Disabled People
- 19 Community Care

- 20 Education
- 21 Immigration and Nationality
- 22 Mental Health
- 23 Alternatives to Court**
- 24 Family Mediation
- 25 Veterans
- 26 Domestic Violence, Abuse and Harassment
- 27 Living Together and your Rights if you Separate
- 28 Dealing with Someone Else's Affairs
- 29 Care Proceedings
- 30 Neighbourhood and Community Disputes
- 31 Changing your Name

Advice Guides

- G1 A Step-by-Step Guide to Choosing a Legal Adviser
- G2 A Step-by-Step Guide to Legal Aid

The leaflets are also available in Welsh, Braille and Audio.

To order any of these leaflets contact the LSC leaflet line on **0845 3000 343** or email LSCLeaflets@ecgroup.co.uk or fax 020 8867 3225.



This leaflet is published by the Legal Services Commission (LSC). It was written in association with the Advice Services Alliance.



LSC023E