

Sector Liaison Panels Terms of Reference

To be reviewed by Ombudsman Services Board annually and revised as appropriate.

Introduction

The Sector Liaison Panel (SLP) is an advisory panel identifying emerging trends and issues facilitating a two-way communication between the sector and Ombudsman Services to maintain and promote effective complaint handling in the sector. The relationship exists to ensure that Ombudsman Services and the sector are well informed through early sharing of concerns, information, ideas and proposals from both sides. There will be SLPs for Energy, Communications and Property.

It shall be for the Ombudsman Services Board to decide on whether an SLP should be formed for any new sector and on its membership.

Membership

- Membership of the SLP will be as determined from time to time by the Ombudsman Services Board.
- The Chief Ombudsman who will normally chair the SLP.
- An Ombudsman Services Board member.
- in Energy, a representative from each of the six largest companies participating in Ombudsman Services and operating in that sector and representatives of relevant trade bodies or professional associations as agreed by Ombudsman Services. This will include the Energy Suppliers Forum (ESF), Energy Retail Association (ERA) and from the Energy Networks Association (ENA).
- In Communications, a representative from each of the six largest companies participating in Ombudsman Services and operating in that sector and representatives of relevant trade bodies or professional associations as agreed by Ombudsman Services. This will include the Federation of Communications Services (FCS) and United Kingdom Competitive Telecommunications Association (UKCTA).
- In Property, a representative from a large company and one from a small business operating in the sector and representatives of relevant trade bodies or professional associations as agreed by Ombudsman Services. This will include RICS, the Association of Residential Managing Agents and may include a representative from the National Association of Estate Agents and from the Association of Residential Lettings Agents. The SLP will have a balance of sector and independent members. The independent members will represent, or be experienced in representing, consumer interests. At least one will have experience in representing the interests of consumers in one of the devolved administrations. (The Ombudsman Services Board has agreed to a request from the Property Member Board that one of the independent members of the Property SLP shall chair the panel.)
- Appointment to the SLP will be undertaken in accordance with any procedure required by Ombudsman Services.

- All independent SLP members to be appointed with the approval of Ombudsman Services.
- The length of terms of office for independent SLP members will be the same as those stated in the Articles of Association for Ombudsman Services Board members.

Role

- To act as a key forum for Ombudsman Services to raise and inform on matters relevant to all stakeholders within the sector.
- To consider and advise Ombudsman Services on key policies and issues relating to the sector and to developments in regulation of the sector, including any relevant Code of Practice.
- To advise Ombudsman Services on the general effectiveness of alternative dispute resolution as a means of strengthening trust and confidence in service provision.
- To comment annually on the Ombudsman Services draft strategy and business plan. (October to December).
- To receive updates on the work of Ombudsman Services, including the Annual Report of Ombudsman Services together with the relevant sector reports.
- To discuss the means of improving the signposting arrangements between companies and Ombudsman Services and other relevant bodies to ensure a successful customer experience.
- To discuss trends in contacts, complaints and remedies to assist in the early identification of concerns and solutions, assist in forecasting and to feedback to the sector.
- To act as a forum where matters relating to consumer information and education about dispute resolution and Ombudsman Services can be discussed.
- To advise Ombudsman Services, as appropriate, on key Ombudsman Services policy proposals.
- To recommend, as required, appointments to Ombudsman Services advisory committees or task groups.

Meetings

- The SLP will normally meet at least twice a year, with provision for additional meetings as necessary.
- The meetings will be chaired by the Chief Ombudsman and may be attended by the Lead Ombudsman for that sector and other Ombudsman Services staff as appropriate.

- Attendance at such meetings may be extended to others who are not SLP members at the Chair's discretion, where it is deemed desirable to do so and where the expertise or contribution of those others would be of benefit to the meeting, task or issue in hand.
- Notes of the meetings and any action points will be circulated and copies will be provided to the Ombudsman Services Board and may also be published on the Ombudsman Services website.
- The Ombudsman Services Annual Report will contain a summary report of the work of the SLP in the preceding year.
- Ombudsman Services will provide the administrative support for the SLP, including the taking and distribution of notes which will be made available to all participating companies.