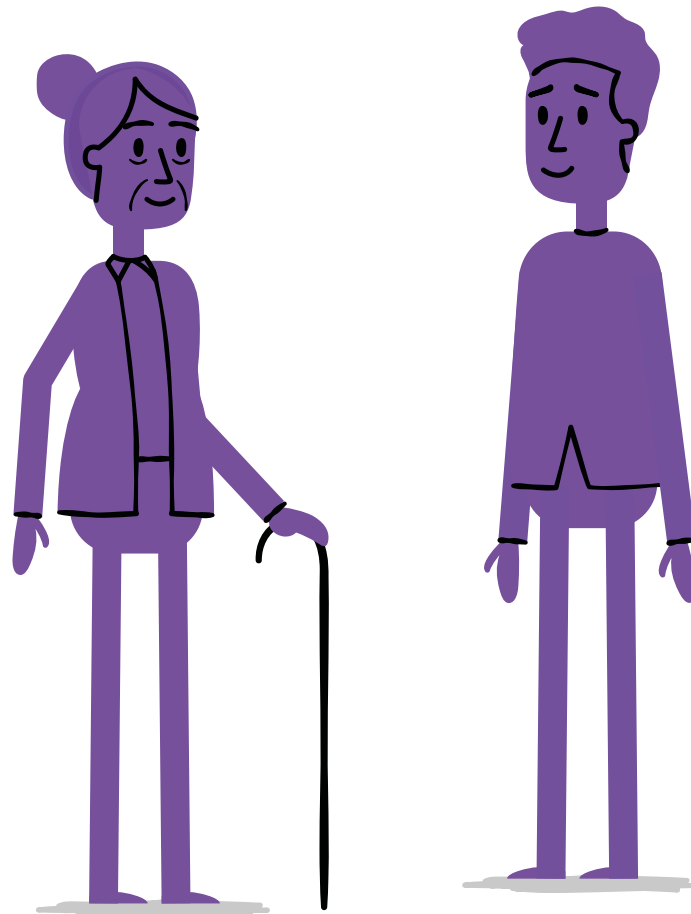
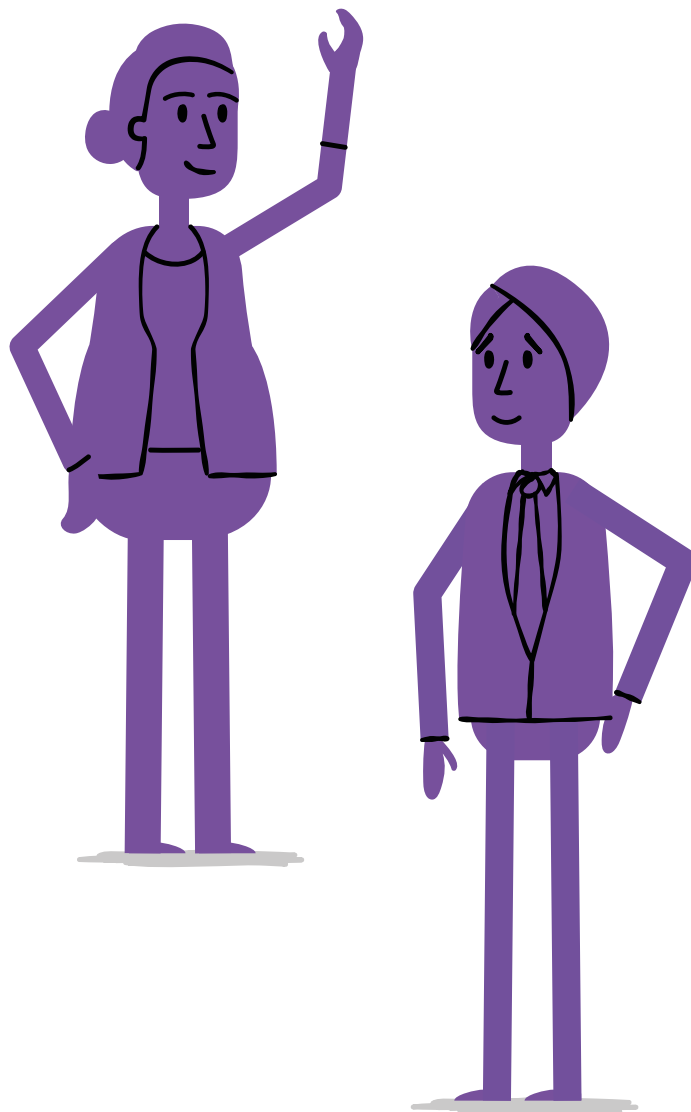


Referring service users to the Ombudsman



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Welcome to this guide

This is one of the Good Complaint Handling series. Guides in this series are designed to help you implement and deliver the expectations in the [UK Central Government Complaint Standards](#).

The guide explains:

- what the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman is
- what the Ombudsman's service does and where it fits in to the complaints procedures of government organisations
- how to refer someone to the Ombudsman if they are unhappy with your response to their complaint.

Read this module alongside the [Model Complaint Handling Procedure](#). You can find guides to related topics on our [website](#).

What standards and guidance are relevant to this guide?

- The [Complaint Standards](#) set out expectations to help you deliver good complaint handling in your organisation.
- **Public Bodies: A Guide for Departments** works with government organisations to provide a good complaint handling service to service users who have finished the organisation's complaints process and wish to take their complaint further.

What the Complaint Standards say

Giving fair and accountable responses

- Colleagues make sure they tell people about their right to escalate a complaint to the next stage if they are not satisfied with the response at the end of the organisation's complaint process. This includes escalating to any independent second tier complaint handler or to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman via their MP.

What Government guidance says

Public Bodies: A Guide for Departments Chapter 8: Policy - Openness and Accountability

- 'In circumstances where complainants have exhausted a body's internal complaints procedures, and remain dissatisfied with the outcome, they should be advised of any external avenues available to them to enable them to pursue the matter further, including, if appropriate, referring the matter to the Parliamentary Ombudsman via an MP.'

What to do

The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman is the last stage of the UK central Government complaints procedure.

The Ombudsman makes final decisions on complaints that have not been resolved by Government departments and other public organisations in the UK and the NHS in England. The Ombudsman's office does this fairly, without taking sides. The service is free of charge.

Before someone comes to the Ombudsman, they need to complain to your organisation and give you a chance to respond to their concerns.

Tip: Every year lots of people complain to the Ombudsman too early, before they have received the final written response from the organisation they are complaining about.

If someone is unhappy or unsure about this, point them to the Ombudsman's website (www.ombudsman.org.uk) or helpline (0345 015 4033), to confirm it.

Telling people about the Ombudsman's service

If someone is unhappy about how your organisation has answered their complaint, they have a right to ask the Ombudsman to look into it for them. You need to make sure they are aware of this.



Explain the Ombudsman's role in any information you provide about your complaints process. This includes on your website and in any leaflets or letters that explain how your organisation deals with complaints.



Tell service users and anyone representing them that they must approach their Member of Parliament (MP) and ask them to put their complaint to the Ombudsman.



There are time limits for complaining to the Ombudsman, so tell service users they need to contact the relevant MP as soon as possible. This should ideally be no later than 12 months from the point when they became aware they had something to complain about.



Make sure your final written response to every complaint explains that if the person wants to take the matter further, they can approach the Ombudsman.



Explain that the Ombudsman's service is free to everyone.



Give details of the Ombudsman's website (www.ombudsman.org.uk) and helpline (0345 015 4033).



Tell service users about any advice organisations or charities that might support them when they make a complaint.



If the Ombudsman's casework staff believe your organisation can do more to resolve a complaint, they may contact you to discuss this.

Complaints that do not fall under the Ombudsman's jurisdiction

If the complaint, or any part of it, does not fall under the jurisdiction of the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, you should signpost the service users to any other organisation that might be able to help them. If you are unsure about where to signpost the person, there is information on the [Ombudsman Association's website](#). You can also use the Ombudsman's complaint checker or call the helpline on 0345 015 4033 for advice. A suggested paragraph is included in the Examples and practical tools section of this guidance.

Examples and practical tools

Example of a signposting paragraph to include in your final responses:

'If you are not happy with how we have dealt with your complaint, and you would like to take the matter further, you can approach your MP and ask them to refer the matter to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman. The Ombudsman service is free for everyone. There is a time limit for making your complaint, so you should refer your complaint to your MP as soon as possible. To find out more about the service visit the website www.ombudsman.org.uk or call 0345 015 4033.'

Ombudsman leaflet

This is for people who have completed your organisation's complaints process and now want to take things further. You should give this to service users when you send them their final written response to a complaint. You can download the leaflet from the Ombudsman's website: [Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman: How we can help you](#).

Guidance for departments on handling Ombudsman cases

This notice by the Cabinet Office explains how departments, agencies and non-departmental public bodies should handle an Ombudsman case. It also sets out the steps of an investigation and the issues you need to keep in mind. The guidance is available online: [Handling of Ombudsman cases: guidance for departments](#).

If you would like this document in a different format, such as Daisy or large print, please [contact us](#).

**Let's make
complaints
count!**

