

*Housing Ombudsman Service*

# ***Voluntary Membership***

***The Housing Ombudsman Service deals with complaints and disputes affecting a wide range of property issues. All registered social landlords in England and other housing bodies belong to the Service on a mandatory basis. Landlords and letting or management agents who are not in the mandatory jurisdiction of the Ombudsman may join the Service on a voluntary basis.***



Housing  
Ombudsman  
Service

Most private landlords and agents want to provide a good service: they want to earn a good reputation and let and manage their homes easily. Codes of practice encourage landlords and agents to have effective complaints procedures. Nevertheless, tenancy disputes inevitably arise however good the landlord or the agent is.

Disputes cost money and time: going to court to solve them can be very expensive and sometimes damaging to the relationships. If they are left unresolved they can undermine competent housing management.

The Housing Ombudsman Service offers an impartial, careful, and cost-effective review of complaints and disputes, after the landlord's or agent's procedures have been followed.

The Ombudsman's rulings are conclusive. He makes his decisions according to what is fair in all the circumstances of each case.

## ***How does the Service work?***

The Service staff consider complaints and disputes submitted by tenants and others receiving housing services from landlords and agents. In certain circumstances the Service may deal with disputes submitted by the landlords or agents themselves. What caused the complaint or dispute must have happened within the previous 12 months or have completed the organisation's own complaints procedures within that period, although sometimes there are shorter deadlines.

The Service makes decisions after careful enquiries to discover the facts. During those inquiries we will usually try and find a way to achieve a local settlement or put the matters to an adjudication on papers only or with a hearing. We may instead offer mediation or other

methods to deal with the problem more quickly and informally. When necessary, we will carry out an investigation, which is usually very time-consuming. The parties in dispute will receive information about these options after the Service makes a preliminary assessment of the case.

## ***What will it cost?***

Most landlords and agents pay a small annual flat fee, levied on every home they own or manage. Some specialist dispute-resolution initiatives have a different funding regime. The fee is usually increased every year by the rate of inflation. Depending on how many units a landlord owns or an agent manages, the savings from legal costs involved in just one court case could pay for the Service fee.

The fee covers the full range of dispute resolution methods the Service may use – not only the Ombudsman and his skilled staff, and mediation and conciliation, but also access to the advice they receive from barristers and solicitors on points of law, and from experts on accountancy, surveying, and housing management.

## ***How is the Service run?***

The Service is administered by Independent Housing Ombudsman Ltd, a company limited by guarantee and not trading for profit. The Ombudsman's appointment is approved by the Secretary of State.

The Ombudsman is required to publish an annual report of his work. He has performance targets and casework procedures for the Service, which operates according to a business plan.

## ***How can a private landlord or agent join the Service voluntarily?***

There are basic criteria that a voluntary member must meet, including:

- *agreeing to abide by the rules of the Service;*
- *having a complaints procedure for its users;*
- *adopting a code of practice (the codes of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors or the Association of Retirement Housing Managers are appropriate).*

Applications to join must be made to the Secretary of IHO Ltd; all applicants who meet the criteria will be accepted.

## ***How can you get more information?***

A senior member of the Service staff will be pleased to give a presentation to the directors, executive officers or other representatives of any landlord or agent who wish to consider voluntary membership.

Application documents and further information can be requested from our offices or through our website at **[www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk)** .

