

Ombudsman Association Service Standards Framework



Introduction

The Ombudsman Association Service Standards Framework is a document that sets out what the Association's members and stakeholders considers to be good practice. It was developed by the Ombudsman Association, with draft development facilitated by BSI Standards Limited. The framework came into effect in May 2017.

The framework provides recommendations and guidance to member organisations to help them improve their own performance, embed good practice and demonstrate the quality of service they provide. The framework aims to clarify what service users can expect. As a tool, it can be used to manage expectations and build trust and confidence in the services that members provide. In meeting the standards members can be more effective in providing individual redress and improving the services of the bodies in jurisdiction.

The framework is also designed to enable members to report on their performance to the public and the organisations they are accountable to. Members should assess and report on their performance towards meeting the service standards and publish this on a regular basis, at least annually. As part of this reporting members should be able to demonstrate how performance information is used to support learning and improvement in the organisation.

We are committed to delivering an excellent service to the people who use our service and to the bodies in our jurisdiction. In this paper we aim to demonstrate our commitment to the framework and set out how we are meeting the standards.

Benchmarking exercise

In July 2017 we carried out a benchmarking exercise to determine how well we are meeting and measuring ourselves against the standards using our internal mechanisms. The results of the benchmarking exercise are set out in the tables below:

Accessibility

What the Framework says	How does the LGSCO achieve this?
Members' service should be free to complainants.	We provide a free service.
Members should ensure that their procedures are customer focused	<p>We ensure our procedures are customer focussed through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • quality checking against our quality and standards; • analysis of data from the customer satisfaction survey. This is reported to Leadership Team and forms part of our quality matrix which we report to CLAE; • dip-sampling of cases where complainants have responded to the customer satisfaction survey enables us to identify opportunities to improve our casework practices and customer service; • responding to complaints about our service enables us to identify opportunities to improve our casework practices and customer service; • our External Reviewer reviews our approach to handling service complaints and makes recommendations to improve casework practices and customer service. His reports are discussed at the Casework Managers meeting and forms part of the quality matrix which is reported to CLAE; • we have numerous Factsheets to help members of the public understand more about our service and what they can reasonably expect from us; • every six months we review 5% of cases where reasonable adjustments were requested to see how we responded. This is reported to Casework Managers meeting and forms part of our quality matrix which we report to CLAE; • training staff on reasonable adjustments and promoting awareness of and embedding our policy on reasonable adjustments.
Members should work with complainants to understand their needs, in order for complainants to access their service easily	<p>To ensure we understand the needs of complainants so that they can access our service easily we:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • every six months we review 5% of cases where reasonable adjustments were requested to see how we responded. This is reported to Casework Managers meeting and forms part of our quality matrix which we report to CLAE;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide training staff on reasonable adjustments and promoting awareness of and embedding our policy on reasonable adjustments; • provide a range of methods for accessing our service – telephone, letters, email and online complaint form • hold an Advisory Forum three times a year, the purpose of which is to ensure that feedback from the users of our service is the primary driver for service improvement and development; • customer satisfaction survey asks respondents to rate the ease within which they could access our service.
<p>Members should make reasonable efforts to support access to their services for any user, including working with representatives and others to support complainants through their service, and publish their procedures for doing this</p>	<p>We accept complaints from representatives and advocates acting on behalf of the person affected and we publish our procedure for obtaining consent in such cases. We publish our policy on reasonable adjustments and measure our adherence to it. This is reported to Casework Managers meeting and forms part of our quality matrix which we report to CLAE.</p>
<p>Members should listen to what complainants want from them and ensure they understand their complaint. If a complainant is complaining about an organisation or issue that the member cannot consider complaints about, where possible they should direct the complainant to the relevant Association member, or another organisation who may be able to help</p>	<p>We strive to ensure we fully understand the complaints brought to us and the outcomes sought by complainants. This is embedded within our quality checking procedures, post-decision review process, service complaints procedure, decision standards, manuals for Intake, Assessment and Investigation and our standard letters for corresponding with complainants. We issue draft decisions when we have gathered the evidence required to decide a complaint. This provides a further opportunity to ensure we have properly understood the complaint and for the complainant to comment on our findings and any recommendations we have made.</p> <p>We use standard paragraphs in our decision statements for occasions when there are other bodies better placed to consider a complaint brought to us and we signpost complainants to them when this is clear. Our published guidance on jurisdiction supports investigative staff to reach confident decisions about whether we have jurisdiction to investigate complaints brought to us.</p> <p>We measure our performance in Intake in relation to providing correct advice and signposting.</p>

Communication

What the Framework says	How does the LGSCO achieve this?
<p>Members should treat service users courteously, respectfully and with dignity</p>	<p>We ensure that we treat service users with courtesy, respect and dignity through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promoting and embedding our quality standards across all areas of casework, • casework briefings, • reviewing our communications with service users when responding to service complaints, • the work of our External Reviewer who reviews how we handled a random selection of service complaints. This is reported to Casework Managers meeting and forms part of our quality matrix which we report to CLAE; • analysis of customer satisfaction survey responses. This is reported to Leadership Team and forms part of our quality matrix which we report to CLAE; • dip-sampling of cases where complainants have responded to the customer satisfaction survey enables us to identify opportunities to improve our casework practices and customer service; • analysis of decisions on service complaints. This is reported to the Casework Managers meeting and forms part of our quality matrix which we report to CLAE. <p>Our telephone call recording pilot provides a further opportunity to ensure we communicate appropriately with people who use our service.</p>
<p>Members should communicate with complainants through a complainant's own chosen method where possible</p>	<p>We currently accept complaints by email, letter, telephone or via our web complaint form. We ask complainants to confirm their preferred method of contact when they use our service. We promote our reasonable adjustments policy to all casework staff and review 5% of cases where reasonable adjustments were requested to see how we responded. This is reported to Casework Managers meeting and forms part of our quality matrix which we report to CLAE.</p>
<p>Members should explain their role to service users</p>	<p>We achieve this throughout our involvement with service users (Intake, Assessment, Investigation & at post-decision review). Our decision statements and standard paragraphs explain our role and powers. We also have various factsheets and information on our website that provide information to service users about our role and jurisdiction. This information is reviewed annually. Our External Reviewer provides feedback and makes recommendations to improve the information we provide to service users</p>

	about our role. His reviews are carried out through the lens of a service user and a focus on improving our customer service.
Members should let complainants know what they can and cannot do, and, if they are unable to help them explain why	Please see above. Additionally, we carry out targeted checks on a jurisdictional theme. This is reported to Casework Managers meeting and forms part of our quality matrix which we report to CLAE.
Members should clearly explain to service users their process for handling complaints and likely timescales	We publish our service standards and time targets and monitor and report to CLAE on our performance against them: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intake 24-hour target • Intake calls answered within 60 seconds • Assessment 20 working day target • 13, 26 and 52 week targets • less than 60 cases over 52 weeks • service complaints and review requests dealt with within 20 working days • data from Intake on correct advice and signposting
Members should keep service users regularly informed of the progression of their case, and how long things are likely to take	Please see above. Additionally, our policy is to keep in touch with service users at least every 20 working days to provide updates on the progression of their case. We monitor our adherence to this through our procedures for dealing with service complaints and post-decision review requests. Our External Review also reviews how well we handle service complaints and whether they are dealt with within our published timeframe.
Members should tell service users who they can contact if they have any questions at different stages in the handling of the case, and how they can do so	When forwarding a case to Assessment, Advisors in Intake write to service users to confirm this. Allocation letters ensure service users are provided with the name and contact details of the person dealing with their case at the Assessment, Investigation and post-decision review stage. This also happens when service complaints are allocated to managers.
Members should be accurate in their communications with service users using plain and clear language	We achieve this through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promoting and embedding our decision standards across all casework teams; • ensuring casework staff are familiar with the Statement of Reasons manual; • regular quality checking; • casework managers meet three times a year to review 21 statement of reasons to decide whether they meet our written standards, whether they are suitable for publishing on our website and whether they are reasonable and defensible; • casework briefings; • Stylewriter software;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • our post-decision review process; • induction and on-going training (internal and external); • the Policy and Comms team carry out a style check on all public and focus reports that we issue.
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Professionalism

What the Framework says	How does the LGSCO achieve this?
Members should ensure that the staff who consider complaints have the relevant knowledge, training and skills to make decisions, or have access to suitable professional advice	<p>We achieve this through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • internal and external subject training; • induction programmes for new investigators; • mentoring scheme; • casework briefings; • Casework Policy Forum; • subject forums meet each month to discuss cases and topical issues; • intranet subject guidance material – currently being reviewed by the Casework Policy Forum; • Guidance on Jurisdiction; • Guidance on Remedies; • scheme of delegation; • legal advice – Bevan Brittan.
Members should deal with complaints in a timely manner, taking into account the complexity of the case.	<p>We publish our service standards and time targets and monitor and report on them to the casework managers meeting and CLAE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intake 24-hour target • Intake calls answered within 60 seconds • Assessment 20 working day target • 13, 26 and 52 week targets • less than 60 cases over 52 weeks • service complaints and review requests dealt with within 20 working days

<p>Members should ensure that remedies are appropriate and take account of the impact any identified faults have had on the complainant</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • review of service complaint handling by our External Reviewer <p>We achieve this through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promoting and embedding our Guidance on Remedies; • subject forums; • casework briefings; • Casework Policy Forum / casework guidance statements; • Casework Impact Group; • post-decision review process; • analysis of data from the customer satisfaction survey. This is reported to Leadership Team and forms part of our quality matrix which is reported to CLAE; • reviewing 5% of cases where we have obtained a remedy to check compliance with our published guidance on remedies. This is reported to Leadership Team and forms part of our quality matrix which is reported to CLAE; • obtaining feedback from the training we deliver to bodies in jurisdiction. This is reported to Leadership Team and forms part of our quality matrix which is reported to CLAE; • analysing the media impact of published decisions and special publications. This is reported to Leadership Team and forms part of our quality matrix which is reported to CLAE.
<p>Members should use the outcomes of complaints to promote wider learning and improvement to the service and the sector complained about</p>	<p>We achieve this through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • publication of subject-specific focus reports; • public reports; • annual review of adult social care complaints; • training for bodies in jurisdiction; • recommending remedies to address wider public interest issues; • recording relevant information on the ECHO BinJ handling screen; • analysing the data on media impact of published decisions and special publications. This is reported to Leadership Team and forms part of our quality matrix which is reported to CLAE; • we review 5% of cases where we have obtained remedies to check compliance with our published Guidance on Remedies. This is reported to the Casework Managers meeting and forms part of our quality matrix which is reported to CLAE.
<p>Members should ensure their record keeping is accurate and that they hold data securely.</p>	<p>We achieve this through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promoting awareness of and embedding our Information Security Policy;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing training to staff on information security; • promoting guidance on the use of the 'Do not disclose' folder in ECHO; • regular quality checking; • six monthly reviews of the status of the Citizen Register. This is reported to the Casework Managers meeting and forms part of our quality matrix which is reported to CLAE; • four-monthly reviews on quality checks. This is reported to the Casework Managers meeting and forms part of our quality matrix which is reported to CLAE; • the Post-Decision Review process; • analysing data breaches. This is reported to Leadership Team and forms part of our quality matrix which is reported to CLAE.
<p>Members should ensure that if and when sharing of information is necessary, it is done appropriately.</p>	<p>We achieve this through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promoting awareness of and embedding our Information Security Policy; • providing training to staff on information security; • promoting guidance on the use of the 'Do not disclose' folder in ECHO; • providing guidance to staff on redacting documents; • analysing data breaches. This is reported to Leadership Team and forms part of our quality matrix which is reported to CLAE.
<p>Members should follow their published processes when dealing with complaints about their own service, and they should acknowledge and apologise for any mistakes they make</p>	<p>We achieve this through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promoting and embedding our 'Complaints about us' (CAU) process; • the work of the External Reviewer who reviews 10 cases every six months where we have received a service complaint. This is reported to the casework managers meeting and forms part of our quality matrix which is reported to CLAE; • analysis of data on decisions on service complaints and service complaints dealt within 20 working days. These measures are reported to the casework managers meeting and form part of our quality matrix which is reported to CLAE.
<p>Members should actively seek feedback about their service and use it to improve</p>	<p>We achieve this through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sending the customer satisfaction survey to complainants after we have issued a decision on their complaint; • analysis of data from the BinJ satisfaction survey;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • analysis of data from the customer satisfaction survey. This is reported to Leadership Team and forms part of our quality matrix which is reported to CLAE, • the work of the External Reviewer who provides feedback on how we handled a selection of service complaints. This is reported to the Casework Managers meeting and forms part of our quality matrix which is reported to CLAE; • analysis of a sample of cases where a complainant has responded to the customer satisfaction survey. The Professional Practice Co-ordinator carries out a dip-sampling exercise every quarter to identify good practice and opportunities for improvement.
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Fairness	
What the Framework says	How does the LGSCO achieve this?
Members should work with service users without discrimination or prejudice	We achieve this through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • induction of new staff; • ongoing training; • promoting and embedding our quality standards; • quality monitoring of casework; • our complaints about us process; • our Post-Decision Review process; • the work of the External Reviewer; • the customer satisfaction dip-sampling exercise carried out by the Professional Practice Co-ordinator, line management reviews with individuals.
Members should make decisions on cases based on their independent and impartial evaluation of the relevant evidence	We achieve this through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promoting and embedding our Quality Framework; • promoting and embedding our Quality and Standards manual; • promoting and embedding our published policy on how we deal with conflicts of interests; • our Intake, Assessment and Investigation manuals; • Guidance on Remedies; • Guidance on Jurisdiction;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the work of the Casework Policy Forum; • Casework Briefings; • intranet subject guidance; • quality checking; • our Post-Decision Review process; • our process for dealing with service complaints.
The reasons for decisions should be documented and explained to relevant parties	We issue decision statements and public reports to complainants and bodies in jurisdiction and have a commitment to publish (almost) all our decisions on our website.
Members should publish information concerning any opportunities that may exist for service users to challenge their decisions	We publish our Post-Decision Review and CAU procedures on our website and provide copies to complainants upon request. We also explain the process for seeking judicial review where appropriate.
Members should make clear to service users their approach to unacceptable behaviour	We provide Factsheets and information on the website setting out our policy on unacceptable behaviour. We also provide internal guidance to staff on managing unreasonable complainant behaviour. We maintain and monitor a Citizen Register. This information is reported to the casework managers meeting and forms part of our quality matrix which is reported to CLAE.

Transparency

What the Framework says	How does the LGSCO achieve this?
Members should publish information about the most senior staff in charge of decisions on complaints within their organisation, including the rules under which members operate	We publish our organisation charts on our website. HR policies are specified on our website and are available on request.
Members should have procedures in place to deal with any conflicts of interest around the handling of complaints	We have a policy on dealing with conflicts of interest and publish this on our website.
Members should be transparent about their investigation with the relevant service users	Our policy is to share with complainants all the evidence on which we have reached a decision. We publish information about our casework procedures and provide factsheets to complainants. Our policy is to publish (almost) all our decisions on our website.
Members should publish the learning that can be drawn from the complaints they handle in order to drive service improvement across the sector	Our policy is to publish (almost) all our decisions on our website. In addition, we: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • produce and publish focus reports on topical issues;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • publish an annual review of adult social care complaints; • issue annual letters to Councils setting out any learning from the complaints we have investigated to promote service improvements; • contribute towards public consultations on relevant issues.
Members should provide service users with information explaining the approach they take to handling complaints about their own service	We publish our CAU process on our website and provide copies to complainants upon request. We also publish the External Reviewer's bi-annual reports and a statement by the External Reviewer in our annual report.
Members should explain to complainants the procedures in place about what action can be taken if remedies are not implemented by the organisation complained about	We have procedures in place for following up on remedies and recommendations, we can register new complaints or consider public reports if we are not satisfied a body in jurisdiction has implemented our recommendations. Our Remedies Process Manual provides guidance to staff on how to record remedies and follow up on compliance.

Mark Bednarski
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26 April 2018

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Chief Executive
26 April 2018