

The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's Principles for Remedy

This document gives our views on the Principles that should guide how public bodies provide remedies for injustice or hardship resulting from their maladministration or poor service. It sets out for complainants and bodies within the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman's jurisdiction how we think public bodies should put things right when they have gone wrong and our approach to recommending remedies.

These *Principles for Remedy* should be read in conjunction with our *Principles of Good Administration* and *Principles of Good Complaint Handling*.

Remedying injustice and hardship is a key aspect of the Ombudsman's work. Not all maladministration or poor service results in injustice or hardship, but where it does, our underlying principle is to ensure that the public body restores the complainant to the position they would have been in if the maladministration or poor service had not occurred. If that is not possible, the public body should compensate them appropriately.

We aim to secure suitable and proportionate remedies for complainants whose complaints are upheld and, where appropriate, for others who have suffered injustice or hardship as a result of the same maladministration or poor service. We want public bodies to be fair and to take responsibility, to acknowledge failures and apologise for them, to make amends, and to use the opportunity to improve their services.

There is a range of appropriate responses to a complaint that has been upheld. These will include both financial and non-financial remedies. Financial compensation will not be appropriate in every case, but public bodies should not rule it out as a form of remedy for justified complaints. We understand that, for public bodies, there is often a balance between responding appropriately to people's complaints and acting proportionately within available resources. However, finite resources should not be used as an excuse for failing to provide a fair remedy.

The Ombudsman's Principles for Remedy accords with HM Treasury's guidelines on remedy as set out in *Managing Public Money* and is cited as best practice in the *NHS Finance Manual*.

The Principles set out here are intended to promote a shared understanding of how to put things right when they have gone wrong and to help public bodies in the Ombudsman's jurisdiction provide fair remedies.

Principles for Remedy

Good practice with regard to remedies means:

1 Getting it right

- Quickly acknowledging and putting right cases of maladministration or poor service that have led to injustice or hardship.
- Considering all relevant factors when deciding the appropriate remedy, ensuring fairness for the complainant and, where appropriate, for others who have suffered injustice or hardship as a result of the same maladministration or poor service.

2 Being customer focused

- Apologising for and explaining the maladministration or poor service.
- Understanding and managing people's expectations and needs.
- Dealing with people professionally and sensitively.
- Providing remedies that take account of people's individual circumstances.

3 Being open and accountable

- Being open and clear about how public bodies decide remedies.
- Operating a proper system of accountability and delegation in providing remedies.
- Keeping a clear record of what public bodies have decided on remedies and why.

4 Acting fairly and proportionately

- Offering remedies that are fair and proportionate to the complainant's injustice or hardship.
- Providing remedies to others who have suffered injustice or hardship as a result of the same maladministration or poor service, where appropriate.
- Treating people without bias, unlawful discrimination or prejudice.

5 Putting things right

- If possible, returning the complainant and, where appropriate, others who have suffered similar injustice or hardship, to the position they would have been in if the maladministration or poor service had not occurred.
- If that is not possible, compensating the complainant and such others appropriately.

- Considering fully and seriously all forms of remedy (such as an apology, an explanation, remedial action, or financial compensation).
- Providing the appropriate remedy in each case.

6 Seeking continuous improvement

- Using the lessons learned from complaints to ensure that maladministration or poor service is not repeated.
- Recording and using information on the outcome of complaints to improve services.

These Principles are not a checklist to be applied mechanically. Public bodies should use their judgment in applying the Principles to produce reasonable, fair and proportionate remedies in the circumstances. The Ombudsman will adopt a similar approach in recommending remedies.