

Issue 8 – April 2020

The Pensions Ombudsman News

Welcome to the eighth edition of The Pensions Ombudsman (TPO) News. In this issue, we include details of some of our latest events and our website redevelopment project. If you are interested in contributing in future newsletters, please contact mairi.dearden@pensions-ombudsman.org.uk

Introductory message from Pensions Ombudsman, Anthony Arter

In these difficult and uncertain times, I hope you and your families are all keeping safe and well.

At TPO we have been following official government guidelines to protect the wellbeing and health of our staff. Since the increased measures were announced, all our staff have been working from home. We are extremely lucky that we have the technology to allow us to work from home as easily as we can from the office. As far as we are concerned, it is business as usual, albeit with some adjustments and modifications as we navigate the ongoing situation.

But, of course, there are challenges. One of the outcomes of the new lockdown measures is that we can no longer collect and deal with our post. This creates difficulties for us in processing any new enquiries or complaints whether received by post or by email. While the current situation continues, we will be focusing on existing enquiries and complaints only.

Our phone lines are now open from Monday to Friday between 10.00am and 2.00pm. We are carefully monitoring the ongoing situation and hope to be able to restore full service as quickly as possible.

Given the additional pressures we are all facing, we will be flexible in our approach to existing pension complaints, whenever possible.

We will continue to take into account the latest guidance from The Pensions Regulator to allow for the possible effects that the current crisis is having on our stakeholders and customers.

In particular, we will take every step to ensure that our work does not place unnecessary demands on the NHS or other care providers at this crucial time.

You can find the latest information on the new [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) banner](#) on our website.

Stay home, save lives and I hope we will be able to see each other soon.



Anthony Arter
Pensions Ombudsman



TPO News

With this unprecedented break from our usual stakeholder meets-and-greets, the Stakeholder Team is taking this as an opportunity to update our contacts and make sure that we have the right contacts in the right organisations.

To help provide a better service to you and to keep you up to date, we would appreciate it if you could please share your Business Continuity Plan (where possible) and any interim contact details.

As you can see from the [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) banner](#) on our website, we are unable to accept correspondence by post at present, so current email addresses would be appreciated. If you are unable to use our secure email service (Mimecast), please let us know. Details can be sent to mairi.dearden@pensions-ombudsman.org.uk or rebecca.orr@pensions-ombudsman.org.uk

We will also be sharing our latest updates on our [Twitter profile](#), so do follow us to stay up to date with developments as the situation evolves.

MPs Event

The Pensions Ombudsman, the Pensions Regulator, the Pension Protection Fund, the Financial Conduct Authority and the Money and Pensions Service recently co-hosted a drop-in event aimed at raising awareness about our services with new MPs. The event was an excellent example of the various government-related pension services working together to improve the pension information MPs give to their constituents. A similar event is planned for later in the year.

Legal update

Legal Forum 30 January 2020

TPO held its fifth specialist event for lawyers in January. The Legal Forum was well-attended, with representatives from a range of providers, legal firms, large scheme employers and industry bodies

present. Members of the Association of Pension Lawyers Litigation Forum were also in attendance.

What is the Legal Forum?

The Legal Forum is a transparent forum to discuss matters such as: changes in legislation; changes in our organisation and its relationship with other industry bodies; and how those matters influence our work and our decision-making ability and those of our stakeholders.

The Legal Forum aims to guide and assist attendees in relation to TPO's approach to handling complaints. It provides an opportunity to share ways in which we can reduce the number of complaints that are referred to us and speed up complaints handling. We hope that our work with the Legal Forum will enable us to improve communication and achieve a better understanding of our customers' needs, helping us to achieve our goals of providing an impartial, consistent, expert pensions dispute resolution service.

What happened?

As was the case in all previous Legal Forum meetings, the Chatham House Rule was adopted and terms of reference were agreed in advance, to establish trust and encourage open and honest debate and meaningful information sharing. The group agreed to discuss the following topics, followed by an open forum for members to raise matters of interest or concern:

- recent appeals against Ombudsman determinations
- pensions liberation
- the impact of *Adams v Carey*
- signposting and CMCs
- TPO's participation in other stakeholder groups.

The next meeting was planned for July 2020 but, given the current uncertainty, we will update you nearer the time.

Update on appeals

TPO would like to highlight that it has updated its information on the court appeal procedure following an Ombudsman Determination.

This is particularly relevant in respect of Scotland where appeals follow a significantly different route than those in England and Wales, being by way of “case stated” rather than an appeal.

TPO has also updated its information in respect of time limits for judicial review and when this may be an appropriate route, rather than an appeal. You can find the updated information on our '[Appealing a Determination](#)' page of our website.

Website Redevelopment

You may be aware that we are currently redeveloping our website. [Civic](#) has been appointed as our supplier for this project and Tarik Rekiouak is the TPO project manager.

A co-design workshop, run by Civic, was held on Monday 24 February with staff, stakeholders, volunteers and customers in attendance. Many thanks to those of you who attended. The workshop provided lots of useful insights which led to the creation of user personas, user journeys as well as shaping the structural design of the new website.

Civic has now presented us with the wireframes which are an initial representation and visual layout of our new website, but without any content or branding. Now that these are complete, Civic has started work on the visual designs. Once finalised, these will be tested by staff, volunteers, stakeholders and customers.

While Civic is working on the visual designs, we will be creating and editing content ready for the website content population phase. This is where content will either be migrated from the existing site or new content will be uploaded for the development phase of the project.

There are three development stages, at the end of which we will have a fully functional website hosted via a staging site. We will be able to fully test the site and ensure all requirements, both functional and design, are met before the website goes live. The go-live date is scheduled for Thursday 28 May.