



OMBUDSMAN
ASSOCIATION

Promoting independent complaint resolution

Annual Report and Accounts **2024**

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The Vision of the Association is that throughout the public and private sectors:

- It is straightforward and simple for people to complain.
- People making a complaint are listened to and treated fairly.
- A complaint is dealt with quickly, fairly and effectively at the earliest stage by suitably trained staff.
- People have access to an ombudsman in all areas of consumer and public services.
- The learning from a complaint is used to improve services.

The objects of the Association are to:

- 1) Support and promote an effective system of complaint handling and redress in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Britain's Crown Dependencies and Britain's Overseas Territories.
- 2) Encourage, develop and protect the role of an ombudsman in both the public and private sectors as the 'best practice' model for resolving complaints, according recognition through membership.
- 3) Provide an authoritative voice and promote best practice and policy for those involved in complaint handling and redress to ensure an effective service for the public.
- 4) Support open and transparent accountability and endorse principles of good complaint handling.

FORWORD

by the Chair of the Association

This annual report marks my last as Chair of the Ombudsman Association (OA), after three years. It has been a privilege to be chair of the association and work with dedicated Board members. I have hugely enjoyed engaging with the breadth of its membership, seeing the difference being made on a daily basis, and supporting the OA to deliver a strong voice for the value of redress to policymakers.

As this report sets out, 2023-24 was another busy year for the OA, not least the Validation Committee. The changes to the OA's Criteria, to ensure it really does represent best practice, were approved at the 2023 AGM following a public consultation that summer, and the re-validation programme of all members was launched in early 2024. We remain deeply grateful to the Validation Committee, particularly the independent members, for their time and expertise.

As in previous years, the sheer number of developments at the Westminster level meant a significant amount of time was spent influencing policy there. That ranged from specific proposals, such as that for a Gambling Ombudsman, to the broader discussions and proposals around reform of the ADR landscape and for a digital / '21st Century' justice system, as put forward by various different stakeholders.

Whilst we have highlighted the lack of a joined-up approach in Westminster to redress reform through my article in Civil Service World on Ombuds Day, it is encouraging to see the growing influence the OA is having, with officials and policy makers actively seeking our views on proposals. Ombudsman schemes

being described as 'unsung heroes' by the Master of the Rolls, to the Lord Chancellor and a room full of senior judiciary and policy officials, certainly felt like a step change.

The 2023 winner of the Outstanding Contribution Award, Evan Lerwill, was announced at our conference last year, and I'm delighted that the award continues to showcase the great work done by colleagues in the ombudsman sector.

The 2023 conference itself in Birmingham was yet another success. I couldn't sign off without reiterating how delighted I am that in-person conferences have become the norm once again – I know I'm not alone in recognising the invaluable opportunities for networking and sharing experiences that the OA Conference provides.

The consistent importance in which members hold the opportunities to share good practice underscores the need for effective management of the various Networks and the promotion of increased engagement via the online OA Community.

As my time as Chair comes to an end, I am both saddened to leave and eager to see what the OA will accomplish under the guidance of the new Chair and the incoming Board members.

I am deeply appreciative of my fellow Board members for their help in steering the OA. I am fortunate to have had outstanding Vice Chairs in Felicity and Margaret. I know we are all immensely grateful to Donal, Maz and Charlee for all their efforts to ensure that the OA runs smoothly, ensuring it continues to be effective in a time of change, provides a platform for colleagues to network and collaborate, and acts as a champion for the sector.

It's been an honour to Chair the OA, and I will of course remain an active member and supporter of this essential institution.



Richard Blakeway
Ombudsman Association Chair
Housing Ombudsman



OUR ACTIVITIES

Support and promote an effective system of complaint handling and redress in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Britain's Crown Dependencies and Britain's Overseas Territories

Gambling Ombudsman

The UK Government's *White Paper*, published in April 2023, tasked the industry with establishing an 'operationally independent' ombudsman (that met the OA's criteria) by summer 2024. The White Paper also committed the Government to legislating to create a statutory ombudsman if the industry-led scheme did not deliver as expected. However, the language in the White Paper implied that the proposed industry-led 'ombudsman' would only deal with complaints about social responsibility or gambling harm, and that the existing eight ADR bodies would remain in place to deal with 'contractual' disputes.

Throughout the year the Chief Executive had several meetings with officials from the Betting & Gaming Council, the UK Department of Culture, Media & Sport, and the Gambling Commission regarding the proposals. The Chief Executive also formally wrote to senior officials setting out the OA's views on the proposals, stressing the need for a single mandatory ombudsman with a holistic jurisdiction over both 'contractual' disputes and complaints about social responsibility and gambling harm.

Reform of ADR Regulations / UK Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Bill

In April the UK Government also published its Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers (DMCC) Bill, which included proposals to improve the quality and consistency of ADR in the consumer sector, in part by mandating accreditation by a competent authority.

Following publication, the Chief Executive attended a Ministerial roundtable in May with the UK Trade Minister and senior figures from consumer organisations to discuss the proposals. A separate meeting was also held with senior officials from the UK Department for Business and Trade to discuss the details behind the proposals. In March 2024 the Chief Executive had a further meeting with officials to discuss the next steps around implementation of the reforms to the ADR Regulations, with the passage of the Bill nearing completion.

Digital justice system / the Unified Online Court model (UK)

The Chief Executive had a number of meetings with senior officials from the UK Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and also with the Master of the Rolls' private office to discuss plans for implementing 'compulsory mediation' before someone can access the Courts, deliberations around creating a single 'portal', and to highlight the more fundamental issues that need to be addressed concerning gaps in redress. MoJ officials also attended the Policy Network meeting in March to present to members.



Ministry
of Justice

Private Rented Sector - England

The UK Government published its Renters (Reform) Bill in May 2023, which alongside several proposals to raise standards for tenants, required all private landlords in England to join an approved / designated ombudsman. The Chief Executive had meetings with officials throughout the year to discuss how the proposals would be taken forward.

Rail Ombudsman

In June the Chief Executive met with officials from the Office of Rail & Road regarding the tender process for the Rail Ombudsman.

UK Administrative Justice Council (AJC)

The Chief Executive continued to inform the work of the AJC through the AJC Steering Group. The AJC published reports from the two working groups on 'Digitisation and the tribunal user experience' and 'Mental health in the administrative justice system' during the year. The reports touch on similar themes around access to justice, the user experience, and the impact on staff. The Academic Panel has now been reformed to act more as a 'commissioning body' for research relevant to the AJC's work. The public education workstream that the Chief Executive had been chairing remained on hold due to capacity issues.

The secretariat for the AJC moved across to the judiciary office from JUSTICE in April, tying in with the end of the Council's second term. The Chief Executive's maximum two terms on the Council and the Steering Group came to an end at that time. The OA's public service ombudsman members are now all represented on the Council going forward to ensure it maintains a balanced geographical and sectoral membership.



Aviation Consumer Policy

In March 2024, the OA **published** an article on the issues within the aviation industry in light of recent cases involving Ryanair which highlighted the lack of consistent and effective redress for passengers. We encouraged the UK Department for Transport to re-prioritise their goal to ensure the protection and fair treatment for consumers in the aviation industry by implementing a single mandatory ombudsman.



ADR All Party Parliamentary Group

Also in June, the Chair and Chief Executive attended a session of the Westminster All Party Parliamentary Group on ADR focused on ombudsman schemes. The session provided a good opportunity to educate UK parliamentarians and other stakeholders on typical ombudsman practice.

Improving Administrative Decision-making in Prisons (England & Wales)

In October the Chief Executive met with a member of JUSTICE's Working Party on Improving Administrative Decision-making in Prisons to discuss the OA's criteria and the roles of the Parliamentary & Health Service Ombudsman, and the Prisons & Probation Ombudsman (PPO).



Civil Justice Council (CJC) National Forum

In November the Chief Executive attended the CJC National Forum in London. The event provided a useful opportunity to engage with stakeholders from across the civil justice system and to keep abreast of recent developments.

Webinar on Adult Social Care in England

In November the Chief Executive attended a webinar on 'The case for a complaint standards authority for adult social care in England', at which the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman, and the Equality & Human Rights Commission presented, to discuss the issues in the sector.

Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI) / Consumer Codes

The Chief Executive had meetings with officials at CTSI in October 2023 and in January 2024 to discuss mutual areas of interest regarding their 'election manifesto', the final version of which called for a Government review of the ADR landscape to make it simpler for consumers and businesses.

Review of ADR in the telecoms sector

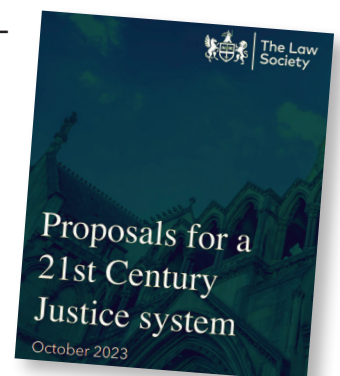
In January the OA **responded** to Ofgem's review of whether consumers and small businesses are receiving accessible, fair and consistent outcomes from the current ADR system in the telecoms sector. The review provided the opportunity for the OA to reiterate the best practice approach of having a single provider within a sector.

Engagement with Westminster MPs

In March a survey was undertaken to inform planning for an MP Engagement Event. An 'MP Engagement Working Group' has since been established to co-design and plan for an event to showcase the work of the ombudsman community, the issues that need addressing, and to increase awareness of the ombudsman sector with MP's.

The Law Society – Proposals for a 21st Century Justice System

In January 2024 the OA **responded** to the Law Society's 'Proposals for a 21st century justice system'. In both our response and in a subsequent **blog post**, shared via social media, we highlighted that the benefits that the proposed single trusted portal



could deliver for the public would not be realised unless there was also broad reform of the 'Non-Court Dispute Resolution' / ombudsman landscape, alongside an ambitious programme of education to raise awareness and improve access to justice.

The cover of the Law Society's report that the OA contributed to.



Online Procedure Rules Committee (OPRC)

In November the Chief Executive gave a presentation at a meeting of the newly formed OPRC. The meeting provided an excellent opportunity to remind leading figures in the Civil Justice System, including the Master of the Rolls, of the key role ombudsman schemes play in changing behaviour and driving systemic improvements.

In the evening the Chief Executive and the Chair attended the official launch of the OPRC at the QEII centre in London. The Lord Chancellor, Lady Chief Justice and other senior figures spoke at the event, at which the Master of the Rolls described ombudsman schemes as ‘unsung heroes’.

Encourage, develop and protect the role of an ombudsman in both the public and private sectors as the ‘best practice’ model for resolving complaints, according recognition through membership.



Review of OA Criteria & Re-validation Programme

The changes to the OA's Criteria, following the public consultation, were approved at the AGM in October 2023. The re-validation programme of all members was launched in early 2024. A ‘Q&A’ webinar for members took place in February, which was also recorded and posted in the [OA Community](#).



OA Podcast: That OA Thing

The final episode of series 1 of *That OA Thing*, was broadcast in April 2023. The discussion with Felicity Mitchell touched on the importance of standards, the value of kindness, and the current challenges across society.

#Ombuds Day

The OA and our members undertook a series of activities on social media, including LinkedIn, Instagram, and X, on 12 October 2023 for Ombuds Day, using a ‘Did you know?’ format. An article by the OA Chair, highlighting the issues in the ombudsman landscape in the UK, was also published in [Civil Service World](#).



Provide an authoritative voice and promote best practice and policy for those involved in complaint handling and redress to ensure an effective service for the public.

Mastering Diversity Conference

In September the Chief Executive attended the inaugural Mastering Diversity conference in Cardiff, speaking on one of the panels. The conference provided an opportunity to identify current good practice.

ANZOA

The Chief Executive continued to maintain engagement with ANZOA (The Australian & New Zealand Ombudsman Association), by meeting with Janine Young, the Secretary & Treasurer (and also the Energy & Water Ombudsman for New South Wales), in November and February, to discuss the similar challenges faced by members of the OA and ANZOA.



Outstanding Contribution Award

The winner of the OA's 2023 Outstanding Contribution Award, Evan Lerwill, from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) was **announced** on 21 June 2023 at the OA's Conference.

The OA's Outstanding Contribution Award, which was established in Caroline Mitchell's memory to recognise and celebrate the outstanding work that so many in the ombudsman community do, was awarded to Evan for the work he has done embedding a human rights-based approach across LGSCO's investigations.

The Chair of the OA, Richard Blakeway, presented the award to Evan at the OA's Conference, which took place at the Hyatt Regency in Birmingham. Richard said:

"I'm delighted to present Evan with the OA's Outstanding Contribution Award. The panel were impressed by the impact his work has had both at LGSCO and more broadly, and I wanted to share with you an excerpt from the nomination form which demonstrates the high regard he is held in:

"Evan's approach to this work has been innovative, positive and committed, and he has brought colleagues into the work and highlighted their contributions and success internally and externally. His quiet dignity in championing this project, coming from a place of strong personal values, has shone through and he has gone above and beyond in the time and effort given whilst managing the other significant and time-consuming aspects of his role."

On receiving the award, Evan spoke about the importance of that work:

"We have witnessed an erosion of human rights in our society over recent years, with public services that protect



basic everyday rights often stretched to threads. We regularly see this in our casework, through the systemic collapse of support for children with special educational needs; the heightened barriers of entry to adult care services; and the chronic shortage of suitable housing for vulnerable families.

It is entirely correct and proportionate that we frame these issues around the language of human rights. This helps promote better public understanding about the rights and protections we should all expect, and strengthens our voice when we share these difficult stories with policy makers and make recommendations for positive change.

I am delighted the Ombudsman Association has recognised the progress we have made in this area, and I'm incredibly grateful for our staff's collective effort in making this happen."

Networks

The OA's Networks facilitate communication between members and enable staff to share experiences and best practice. The online OA Community area has further supported that networking and sharing of information through the dedicated areas for each Network and the discussion forums.

Casework Network

The Casework Network met three times, with each meeting focusing on a particular topic. In May they focused on discrimination and vulnerability, in September on maximizing decision impact, and in January they discussed AI implementation.

Communications Network

Communications Network members supported each other on the OA Community on various topics such as diversity monitoring and call recorded case studies. Colleagues also worked together to have a successful Ombuds Day and saw lots of good interaction across the sector, as well as getting a piece from the OA Chair into Civil Service World. Their meeting in February took place in person at the offices of The Motor Ombudsman, with discussions on topics people were finding challenging and how to overcome any barriers.

Data Protection Network

The Data Protection Network met several times during the year. Topics included **AI, machines and data protection** and **Data Protection Reforms**, subject access requests, and online harms. The last meeting in December 2023 featured a presentation on intelligent automation in casework assisting with managing unreasonable behaviours.

First Contact Network

The First Contact Network met in June and November. Topics discussed included: best practices in creating hybrid working environments; advisory forums; reporting unacceptable actions; use of artificial intelligence; self-reflection in call handling using call recordings; Customer Panels; and complainants' experience of being advised they are 'premature'.

Human Resources Network & Learning & Development Sub-Group

The HR Network and L&D Sub-Group held their first joint meeting in May 2023, discussing several

Engagement with members

The Chief Executive continued to liaise with members via online and face-to-face meetings regarding developments in their sector and how the OA could support them.

In particular, in April he attended the online launch of the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales' new strategy. In September he gave a presentation to the staff of the Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces at their office in London. And in November he had meetings in Dublin with the Financial Services & Pensions Ombudsman, the Garda Ombudsman, and the Office of the Ombudsman.

OA Newsletter

With the appointment of the Communications Manager, the OA Newsletter has been refreshed. In January 2024, we launched the new format, covering the Law Society's Green Paper on '21st Century Justice System', introducing the Communications Manager, and highlighting the OA's revalidation programme.

The next edition was published at the end of February. This issue featured Early Bird pre-booking for the 2024 Bristol conference, articles on supporting vulnerable individuals, PHSO's Mental Health Report, the Housing Ombudsman's call for a Royal Commission, and the Independent Football Ombudsman's progress. It also announced the Outstanding Contribution Award nominations.



MEET THE OA Team

 <p>Donal Galligan Chief Executive</p> <p>With extensive experience of external relations and successfully influencing policy and legislative change within the ombudsman landscape.</p>	 <p>Charlee Boon Communications Manager</p> <p>Embodies substantial practical knowledge in project management and research and how to engage with a range of international, national and regional stakeholders.</p>	 <p>Maz Morgan Executive Assistant</p> <p>Co-ordinates the Annual OA Conferences, with comprehensive administrative expertise to support the Chief Executive, the Board and the OA Membership.</p>
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topics, including mental health, performance management, hybrid working, and the OA caseworker competency framework. In November, the HR Network covered EDI, HR platforms, total reward packages, and potential 2024 legislation changes on bullying and harassment.

Legal Network

The Legal Network met in May, September, and November. Topics covered included a review of recent case law, discussing its implications on functus officio and report retraction powers, the Hamon v UCL case, which may impact student fee disputes during COVID, and discussed approaches to apologies in resolution settlements across different jurisdictions. They also examined the Westminster Joint Committee on Human Rights' report on a Human Rights Ombudsman.

Policy Network

The Policy Network met in September, January, and April. Various policy developments were discussed, many of them at a Westminster level,

including use of Artificial Intelligence, mediation in civil justice, the Digital Markets Bill, Pre-Action Protocols, the Harmon v UCL case, and the report by the Law Society for England & Wales on a '21st Century Justice System'.

OA Conference

The OA's 2023 conference was held in Birmingham on 19-21 June 2023, with several high-profile speakers, including Daniel Hewitt, Christian Weaver, and the Master of the Rolls, and a recorded video from Dmytro Lubinets, the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights. One hundred and twenty-seven delegates attended, and we received extremely positive feedback. The first Summer Seminar was held on the afternoon directly following the conference and focused on underrepresented groups. The presentations from the conference, which included sessions on the cost of living crisis, embedding a Human Rights approach, driving system change, allyship, backlog busting and vicarious trauma, can be found in the [OA Community](#).



Christian Weaver



Master of the Rolls



Daniel Hewitt



Panel for session on "Raising Awareness"



Birmingham Council House

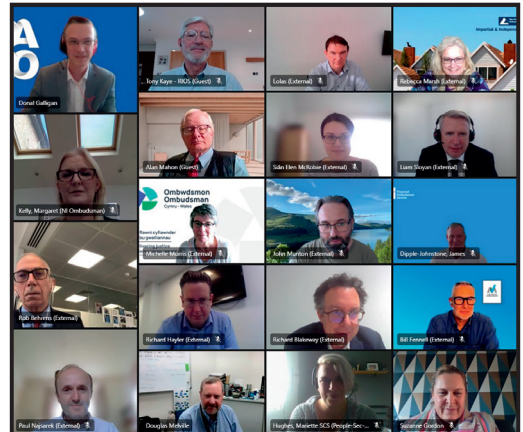
Bernie Davies

GOVERNANCE

Annual General Meeting 2023

The 30th AGM of the Association took place via Teams on 12 October 2023. Members received a report on activities during the year, the audited accounts for 2022/23, and approved the proposed amendments to the OA's Articles regarding the composition of the Board. Elections for the vacant positions on the Board took place, with members elected as follows :

- Chair: Ric Blakeway, Housing Ombudsman
- Vice Chair: Margaret Kelly, Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman
- Ombudsman Members: Bill Fennell, The Motor Ombudsman, and Mariette Hughes, Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces.



Board

The role of the Board is to manage the business of the OA. Several positions changed during the year following the changes to the Board's composition and elections at the AGM in October. The membership of the Board during 2023/24 was:

Chair:

Richard Blakeway
Housing Ombudsman Service

Vice Chair:

Felicity Mitchell
Office of the Independent Adjudicator
(April)

Margaret Kelly
Northern Ireland Public
Services Ombudsman
(May-March)

Board directors:

Rosemary Agnew
Scottish Public Services Ombudsman
(April-October)

Bill Fennell
The Motor Ombudsman

Kevin Grix
The Rail Ombudsman
(April-October)

Mariette Hughes
Service Complaints Ombudsman for
the Armed Forces
(October-March)

Margaret Kelly
Northern Ireland Public
Services Ombudsman
(April)

Rebecca Marsh
The Property Ombudsman

John Munton

Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution

Matt Vickers

Energy Ombudsman &
Communications Ombudsman
(April-October)

Validation Committee

The role of the Validation Committee is to advise the Board on whether applications/re-validation for Ombudsman and Complaint Handler Membership should be approved. The Committee's membership in 2023/24 was:

Chair

Felicity Mitchell
OA Vice-Chair (April)

Margaret Kelly
OA Vice-Chair (May-March)

Representing Ombudsman Members

Margaret Kelly
Northern Ireland Public Services
Ombudsman (April)

Bill Fennell
The Motor Ombudsman (May-March)

Independent Members

Professor Chris Gill
Professor Richard Kirkham
Kate Wellington

Biographies of Board members of the Validation Committee can be found on the [OA's website](#).

MEMBERSHIP

Changes in Membership

There were several changes at ‘office holder’ level amongst the OA’s members during 2023/24:

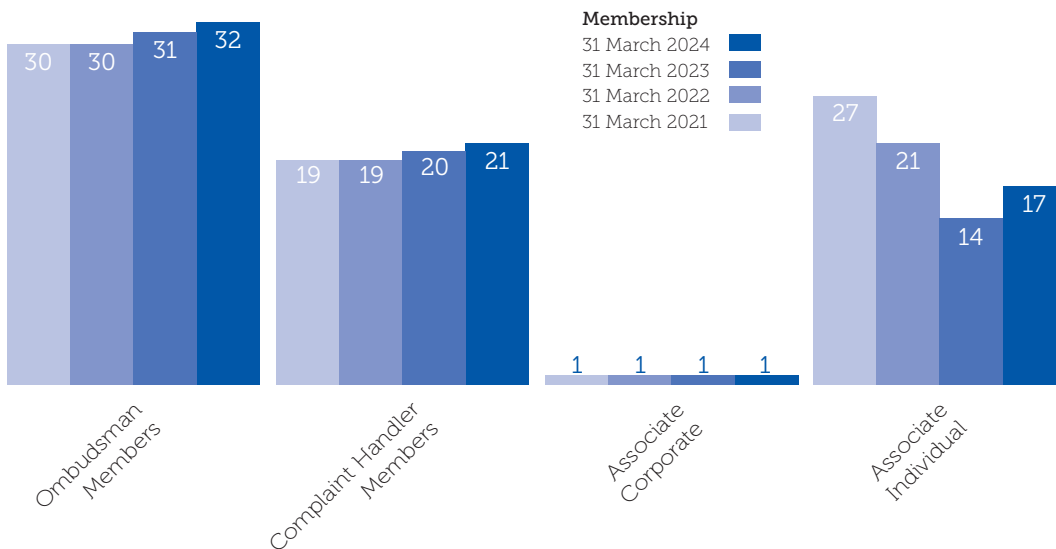
- **Mike McMahon** was appointed as the Adjudicator for the Adjudicator’s Office
- **Rachel Kent** was appointed the Financial Regulators Complaints Commissioner
- **Séamas Ó Concheanainn** was appointed as Coimisinéir Teanga
- **Helen Megarry** was appointed Independent Adjudicator for the Office of the Independent Adjudicator
- **Amerdeep Somal** was appointed Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

The Chief Executive has continued to engage with a number of organisations and stakeholders in the UK, Ireland, the British Crown Dependencies and the British Overseas Territories who have expressed an interest in applying for OA membership, or in establishing an ombudsman in a sector where one does not currently exist, and further applications for membership are expected over the coming years.

Membership of the OA at 31 March 2024, as compared with a year ago:

Members	31 March 2023	31 March 2024
Ombudsman Members	31	32
Complaint Handler Members	20	21

Associate Members	31 March 2023	31 March 2024
Corporate	1	1
Individual	14	17
Total	66	71



MEMBERSHIP

Members of the Association as at 31 March 2024

OMBUDSMAN MEMBERS

1. Bermuda Ombudsman
2. Channel Islands Financial Ombudsman
3. Communications Ombudsman
4. Energy Ombudsman
5. Financial Ombudsman Service, UK
6. Financial Services & Pensions Ombudsman, Ireland
7. The Furniture & Home Improvement Ombudsman
8. Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission
9. Gibraltar Public Services Ombudsman
10. Housing Ombudsman Service
11. Legal Ombudsman, England and Wales
12. Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman, England
13. The Motor Ombudsman
14. New Homes Ombudsman Service
15. Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman
16. Office of the Complaints Commissioner, Turks & Caicos Islands
17. Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education
18. Office of the Ombudsman, Ireland
19. Ombudsman, Cayman Islands
20. Ombudsman for Children, Ireland
21. Ombudsman for the Defence Forces, Ireland
22. Parliamentary & Health Service Ombudsman, UK
23. Pensions Ombudsman, UK
24. Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland
25. The Property Ombudsman
26. The Property Ombudsman Scotland
27. Public Services Ombudsman for Wales
28. The Rail Ombudsman
29. Removals Industry Ombudsman
30. Scottish Public Services Ombudsman
31. Service Complaints Ombudsman for the Armed Forces
32. The Waterways Ombudsman

Complaint Handler Members

1. The Adjudicator's Office
2. Advertising Standards Authority (ASA)
3. An Coimisinéir Teanga (Irish Language Commissioner)
4. Business Banking Resolution Service (BBRS)
5. Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution (CEDR)
6. Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland
7. The Financial Regulators Complaints Commissioner (FRCC)
8. States of Jersey Complaints Panel
9. Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner (OISC)
10. Independent Betting Adjudication Service (IBAS)
11. Independent Case Examiner for DWP (ICE)
12. Independent Complaints Reviewer (for HM Land Registry) (ICR)
13. Independent Football Ombudsman (IFO)
14. Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)
15. Lay Observer for Northern Ireland
16. The Northern Ireland Certification Officer for Trade Unions and Employers' Associations
17. Press Ombudsman, Ireland
18. Office for the Independent Examiner of Complaints (IEC)
19. Scottish Legal Complaints Commission (SLCC)
20. The Dispute Service Limited (TDS)
21. Welsh Language Commissioner (WLC)

Corporate Associate Members

1. Bevan Brittan LLP

REPORT OF THE DIRECTORS

For the Year Ended 31 March 2024

The directors present their report with the financial statements of the company for the year ended 31 March 2024.

Directors

The directors shown below have held office during the whole of the period from 1 April 2023 to the date of this report.

- R A Blakeway
- D A Galligan
- J R Munton
- W Fennell
- M Kelly
- R J Marsh

Other changes in directors holding office are as follows:

- R Agnew resigned 12 October 2023
- S F J Mitchel resigned 30 April 2023
- M J Vickers resigned 12 October 2023
- K Grix resigned 12 October 2023
- M L Hughes appointed 12 October 2023

Statement of directors' responsibilities

The directors are responsible for preparing the Report of the Directors and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and regulations.

Company law requires the directors to prepare financial statements for each financial year. Under that law the directors have elected to prepare the financial statements in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice (United Kingdom Accounting Standards and applicable law). Under company law the directors must not approve the financial statements unless they are satisfied that they give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the company and of the surplus or deficit of the company for that period. In preparing these financial statements, the directors are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- make judgements and accounting estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the company will continue in business.

The directors are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain the company's transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the company and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

Statement as to disclosure of information to auditors

So far as the directors are aware, there is no relevant audit information (as defined by Section 418 of the Companies Act 2006) of which the company's auditors are unaware, and each director has taken all the steps that he or she ought to have taken as a director in order to make himself or herself aware of any relevant audit information and to establish that the company's auditors are aware of that information.

Auditors

The auditors, Bennewith 2018 Limited (Statutory Auditors), will be proposed for re-appointment at the forthcoming Annual General Meeting.

This report has been prepared in accordance with the provisions of Part 15 of the Companies Act 2006 relating to small companies.

On behalf of the board:



R A Blakeway, Director

REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT AUDITORS TO THE MEMBERS OF THE OMBUDSMAN ASSOCIATION

Opinion

We have audited the financial statements of Ombudsman Association (the 'company') for the year ended 31 March 2024 which comprise the Income Statement, Balance Sheet and Notes to the Financial Statements, including a summary of significant accounting policies. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards, including Financial Reporting Standard 102 'The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland' (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

In our opinion the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the state of the company's affairs as at 31 March 2024 and of its surplus for the year then ended;
- have been properly prepared in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice; and
- have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006.

Basis for opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs (UK)) and applicable law. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditors' responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements section of our report. We are independent of the company in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the financial statements in the UK, including the FRC's Ethical Standard, and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

Conclusions relating to going concern

In auditing the financial statements, we have concluded that the directors' use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is appropriate.

Based on the work we have performed, we have not identified any material uncertainties relating to events or conditions that, individually or collectively, may cast significant doubt on the company's ability to continue as a going concern for a period of at least twelve months from when the financial statements are authorised for issue.

Our responsibilities and the responsibilities of the directors with respect to going concern are described in the relevant sections of this report.

Other information

The directors are responsible for the other information. The other information comprises the information in the Report of the Directors, but does not include the financial statements and our Report of the Auditors thereon.

Our opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and, except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in our report, we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

In connection with our audit of the financial statements, our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or our knowledge obtained in the audit or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If we identify such material inconsistencies or apparent material misstatements, we are required to determine whether this gives rise to a material misstatement in the financial statements themselves. If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact. We have nothing to report in this regard.

Opinions on other matters prescribed by the Companies Act 2006

In our opinion, based on the work undertaken in the course of the audit:

- the information given in the Report of the Directors for the financial year for which the financial statements are prepared is consistent with the financial statements; and
- the Report of the Directors has been prepared in accordance with applicable legal requirements.

Matters on which we are required to report by exception

In the light of the knowledge and understanding of the company and its environment obtained in the course of the audit, we have not identified material misstatements in the Report of the Directors.

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters where the Companies Act 2006 requires us to report to you if, in our opinion:

- adequate accounting records have not been kept, or returns adequate for our audit have not been received from branches not visited by us; or
- the financial statements are not in agreement with the accounting records and returns; or - certain disclosures of directors' remuneration specified by law are not made; or
- we have not received all the information and explanations we require for our audit; or
- the directors were not entitled to prepare the financial statements in accordance with the small companies regime and take advantage of the small companies' exemption from the requirement to prepare a Strategic Report or in preparing the Report of the Directors.

Responsibilities of directors

As explained more fully in the Statement of Directors' Responsibilities set out on page two, the directors are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements and for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view, and for such internal control as the directors determine necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, the directors are responsible for assessing the company's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the directors either intend to liquidate the company or to cease operations, or have no realistic alternative but to do so.

Auditors' responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue a Report of the Auditors that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (UK) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

The extent to which our procedures are capable of detecting irregularities, including fraud is detailed below:

We obtained an understanding of the legal and regulatory frameworks that are applicable to the entity and determined the most significant are those that relate to FRS 102 Section 1A, pension laws and regulations and tax regulations.

We assessed the risks of material misstatement in respect of fraud as follows:

- Enquiries made of management and those charged with governance
- Analytical procedures used to identify if there were any unusual or unexpected relationships
- Discussions with management to identify any fraud risk factors of related party relationships and transactions.

Based on the results of our risk assessment we designed our audit procedures to identify non-compliance with such laws and regulations identified above.

Enquiries were made of management and those charged with governance. We corroborated our enquiries through the review of Board minutes and other papers provided. There was no contradictory evidence.

We considered the risk of fraud through management override and, in response, we incorporated testing of manual journal entries into our audit approach. We tested year end journals as well as journal entries throughout the year. There were no transactions identified outside the normal course of business.

Based on the results of our risk assessment we designed our audit procedures to identify and to address material misstatements in relation to fraud. We incorporated an

element of unpredictability in the selection of the nature, timing, and extent of audit procedures.

Where transaction meeting risk criteria were identified, we carried out further work such as additional testing to source information.

A further description of our responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements is located on the Financial Reporting Council's website at www.frc.org.uk/auditorsresponsibilities. This description forms part of our Report of the Auditors.

Use of our report

This report is made solely to the company's members, as a body, in accordance with Chapter 3 of Part 16 of the Companies Act 2006. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the company's members those matters we are required to state to them in a Report of the Auditors and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the company and the company's members as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.

A J Bennewith FCA, FCPA, FFA, FFTA, FIPA, DChA, FRSA
(Senior Statutory Auditor) for and on behalf of Bennewith
2018 Limited (Statutory Auditors)

Upper Ground Floor

18 Farnham Road

Guildford

Surrey

GU1 4XA

24 September 2024

INCOME STATEMENT

For the Year Ended 31 March 2024

		Year ended 31.3.24	Year ended 31.3.23
	Notes	£	£
Turnover		264,286	243,001
Administrative expenses		247,776	212,296
Operating surplus	4	16,510	30,705
Interest payable and similar expenses		78	-
Surplus before taxation		16,432	30,705
Tax on surplus		-	-
Surplus for the financial year		16,432	30,705

Balance Sheet

		Year ended 31.3.24	Year ended 31.3.23
	Notes	£	£
Current assets			
Debtors	6	30,491	73,382
Cash at bank		253,864	194,411
		284,355	267,793
Creditors			
Amounts falling due within one year	7	100,579	100,449
Net current assets		183,776	167,344
Total assets less current liabilities		183,776	167,344
Reserves			
Income and expenditure account		183,776	167,344
		183,776	167,344

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the provisions applicable to companies subject to the small companies regime.

The financial statements were approved by the Board of Directors and authorised for issue on 24 September 2024 and were signed on its behalf by:



R A Blakeway, Director



An tOmbudsman Seirbhísi Airgeadais agus Pinsean
Financial Services and Pensions Ombudsman



Local Government &
Social Care
OMBUDSMAN





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Promoting independent complaint resolution

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