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Caroline Mitchell lead ombudsman

In all my years as an ombudsman, my experience has been that professional advisers are just that: professionals. And while the few exceptions unfortunately get a disproportionate amount of attention, the fact is many advisers haven't ever had a complaint referred to us at all. Even if they have, it's likely to have just been one or two.

That's clearly good news. But all the same, the prospect of hearing from us may be particularly worrying for small businesses – not just because they don't know what to expect, but, in some cases, because of the amount of money involved. That's why over the years we've proactively worked with businesses to explain who we are and the way we work. As usual, this year we ran free events around the country, specifically for those who've had little or no contact with us – so we could address their questions and concerns directly.

In March 2016, the *Financial Advice Market Review* recommended that we do even more to support the small businesses we cover. So over the last few months we've held roundtable discussions in Glasgow, Stockport, Basingstoke and Sunderland, bringing IFAs together with our chief ombudsman and the FCA. We've also attended seven of the FCA's Live and Local events. While our roles are distinct, I think it's been very important that advisers have had the chance to challenge us together – and to get the assurance they need that we're on the same page.

The roundtables have been particularly helpful in getting to the bottom of issues that cause uncertainty for advisers – for instance, what should be included in suitability reports, and how we'd approach cases involving "insistent clients" on the back of pension freedoms. We and the FCA have been able to explain that the regulator's guidance in these areas is clear, and that if a business has done what it should, then there's no need to worry. We've really welcomed the honesty of conversations like these and look forward to them continuing into next year and beyond.