

present

From the financial services industry:

- Deanna Oppenheimer, Barclays
- Brian Hartzler, RBS
- Keith Morris, Sabre Insurance
- John Pollock, Legal & General
- David Richardson, Swiss Re
- David Stewart, Coventry Building Society

From the ombudsman service:

- Chris Kelly, chairman
- Natalie Ceeney, chief ombudsman
- Tony Boorman, decisions director
- David Thomas, corporate director

apologies

From industry

- Helen Weir, Lloyds Banking
- Simon Hudson, Tenet Group

claims-management companies (CMCs)

The group discussed the impact of CMCs on relations between the financial services industry and the ombudsman service. It recognised that CMCs fulfil a legitimate purpose for some consumers, who might not otherwise have the confidence to complain to the financial business. Some CMCs do that well, and others do that less well. Consumers do not need help to refer a complaint to the ombudsman service.

Industry obligations in response to vague complaints from some CMCs are a matter for the FSA. But the ombudsman service itself requires CMCs to present properly articulated complaints and sends back complaints that are not properly set out. In PPI cases, the ombudsman service now requires CMCs to provide a completed PPI *consumer questionnaire*.

Where the ombudsman service has substantial concerns about any particular CMC, it passes these on to the Claims Management Regulator through its regular liaison arrangements. Industry should consider whether it has appropriate arrangements to collate and provide evidence to the regulator.

Most present considered that there was scope to identify a wider group of stakeholders to promote good practice by CMCs and to better inform financial businesses and consumers about the issues. The ombudsman service could play a valuable role here but wider engagement would be essential.

ombudsman/industry liaison

The group discussed the arrangements for liaison and input to the ombudsman service's forward planning. It was generally accepted that effective liaison requires senior-level commitment and appropriate-level input at both ends – and the ombudsman service must prioritise its limited resources.

The ombudsman service was now starting to implement a more structured and stratified approach to relations with industry bodies and individual businesses, to ensure that the right people (at the right

level) were speaking to one another – focused mainly towards the financial businesses and sectors that provide the bulk of ombudsman cases.

The ombudsman service is already giving fresh thought to how it consults on its plan and budget – the process having become rather mechanistic over the years – though there are some legal constraints to be observed.

One possibility, for which there was substantial support amongst those present, was to move away from a single plan and budget document towards a two-stage process that involved looking at strategic planning issues first and then at the budget in the light of the discussion that ensues. The group hopes to revisit this issue at its next meeting.

next meeting

The next meeting has been scheduled for Wednesday 15 September 2010.