

Issue ten – December 2020

## The Pensions Ombudsman News

Welcome to the tenth edition of The Pensions Ombudsman (TPO) News. In this issue, we include details of our Stakeholder and Customer surveys, and Legal and Volunteer updates. If you are interested in contributing to future newsletters, please [contact us](#).

### Introductory message from Pensions Ombudsman, Anthony Arter

As we draw near to the end of an unpredictable and challenging year, I hope you are keeping well.

Since our last newsletter, I am delighted that Caroline Rookes has been announced as our permanent Chair and I look forward to continuing to work with her.

Our Corporate Board and governance will be further strengthened with the appointment of three Non-Executive Directors. We expect them to be in place by March/April 2021.

It has been a very busy year with many highlights at TPO. We have continued to grow and welcomed 13 new members of staff including our new Chief Operating Officer, Alex Robertson.

Our online presence is greatly improved thanks to our fantastic new [website](#). We also implemented our Casework Reorganisation Programme which will help us ensure that we meet the needs of our customers.

With this in mind, we have also invited feedback on our service through customer satisfaction surveys at different key stages of our complaints process. Getting feedback on how we are doing is vital and I look forward to implementing the recommendations that have come to light.

I would like to thank those of you who took the time to complete the Stakeholder survey we sent out in September. Your views and insights are incredibly important to us. The information that we received is invaluable and will feed into future business planning.



As we look towards a new year, I hope that we can start to feel a sense of normality come back into our lives and come back together as an organisation, including our Stakeholder Engagement Team working with you in person again.

I wish you all a peaceful, healthy and safe Christmas and New Year, and look forward to seeing you in 2021.



Anthony Arter  
Pensions Ombudsman

## TPO News

### Chair Appointment



Caroline Rookes has been confirmed as TPO's permanent Chair, following her appointment as interim Chair in September 2019 in response to the Tailored Review recommendations.

Caroline stated:

*"I am very pleased and honoured to have been appointed as Chair of The Pensions Ombudsman. I have very much enjoyed working with Anthony and his colleagues during my period as interim Chair. I am delighted that I will be continuing to work with them as they continue to deliver this vital service to pension scheme members and face the combined challenges of transforming the organisation following the Tailored Review and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic."*

### Website Update

You may remember in the last newsletter, we informed you of progress on our website redevelopment project. Our new website has been live since the end of May. Phase two of the project began in June which included enhancements to the website with [FAQs](#) and [case studies](#) sections, as well as a Question Tree on the [homepage](#) which gives customers further information and assistance in deciding whether they should bring a complaint to us. These

enhancements have since gone live on our website.

We are now working on building live chat functionality to our website. We have three options to test before making a final decision and implementing this in the new year.

### Christmas and New Year opening hours

We have amended our telephone hours over the Christmas period:

Monday 21 December 2020 to Monday 4 January 2021	10.00am-3.00pm
Tuesday 5 January to Thursday 7 January	9.00am-5.00pm
Friday 8 January	9.00am-1.00pm

**Please note:** we will be closed on Christmas Eve and all bank holidays.

### Stakeholder Survey

In September, we sent out our first Stakeholder Survey, which sought to gather feedback on our service and improve our understanding of stakeholder engagement with TPO. We canvassed opinion from the following groups: Targeted Parliamentarians; members of our Legal Forum; Private Pension Providers; Public Pension Providers; Consumer Groups; Strategic Contacts; Professional Bodies/Ombudsmen; and Master Trusts. We asked for feedback, categorised under the following broad themes:

- Familiarity, knowledge and understanding of TPO.
- Communication and engagement with our stakeholders.
- TPO's strategic aims.

We are hugely grateful to those of you who took the time to complete the survey, your feedback is invaluable and will help to

inform and influence our work within our Stakeholder Engagement function and across the business. The following three key themes emerged which we will explore and include in future work plans:

- Improving the information and guidance we make available to stakeholders on our website.
- Strengthening our engagement with newer parts of the pensions industry, particularly Master Trusts.
- Expanding our engagement with consumer groups and Parliamentarians.

Finally, people were very keen for us to provide more workshops and events. We will be looking into the best ways to deliver online events in a socially distanced world. The Covid-19 crisis has highlighted the importance we place on working with you to overcome challenges and maintain our connections and professional relationships moving forward.

## Customer Survey

On 7 October, we sent out a survey to 2,260 participants who opened or closed a complaint with us between 1 April and 31 July. The survey consisted of a series of new questions and for the first time we included respondents.

Three key stages were focused on:

- Initial application
- Early resolution stage
- Adjudication stage.

The results of the survey have been analysed and we plan on sending two further surveys by the end of the financial year to use as a baseline against which we can measure future customer satisfaction. We know from our first survey that important issues for our customers, is how long it takes to complete their cases and making

sure that they receive regular updates on progress. We are already taking action to address these issues and tackling waiting times for cases is likely to be an ongoing challenge for us, as demand for our service continues to rise.

## Legal Update

### Legal Forum

TPO's next Legal Forum meeting will take place on Tuesday 26 January 2021 from 2.00pm to 3.30pm, on Zoom.

The Legal Forum is a platform to discuss issues influencing our work and our decision-making ability and those of our stakeholders. It aims to help attendees to understand TPO's approach to handling complaints and to allow us to share ways in which we can reduce the number of complaints we receive and speed up complaints handling. It is also an opportunity for us to obtain thoughts and feedback from pensions lawyers on TPO's work and issues that may affect us.

Events held to date have been well-attended, with representatives from a range of providers, legal firms, large scheme employers and industry bodies present. We are inviting pensions lawyers from within providers, legal firms, large scheme employers and industry bodies to attend. If you are interested in attending, please contact [Tina Norris](#).

## Volunteer News

We normally host an annual seminar for our volunteer network with speakers from across the pension industry presenting on various topical issues.

It will not be a surprise to read this was not possible this year. But we were keen to find another way of delivering these popular sessions. And so, we learnt all about Zoom

(other online webinar providers are available) and ran a session each Thursday between 30 July and 3 September. These were hour long presentations that both staff and volunteers could watch live and ask questions. The presentations were also recorded so those not able to join us could view the presentations at their leisure.

The presentations included:

- An overview of the pensions' landscape by Sir Steve Webb of LCP
- TPR's approach to automatic enrolment enforcement by TPR's Director of Automatic Enrolment, Mel Edwards
- An update by the Pensions Ombudsman, Anthony Arter.

We also had presentations by internal speakers on:

- TPO's casework reorganisation;
- Information Security; and
- The new volunteer website.

We were delighted by the feedback received and hope to do something similar in future.

Our Volunteer Network Manager, Paul Day, and Head of Early Resolution, Tony Attubato, gave a presentation to the Pensions Management Institute's DC and Master Trust Symposium on 8 October, to promote volunteering for The Pensions Ombudsman.

You can view the [video and presentation](#).

176 people watched the presentation live and we were pleased to subsequently receive over 20 new volunteer applications. We are always on the lookout for new volunteers. If you, or any of your colleagues are interested, please encourage them to contact us. We are also happy to arrange a presentation to interested groups at your workplace or professional association.

Please contact, [Paul Day](#) or 020 3959 1612.

## Quality Assurance

What we do at TPO is really important, but what is equally vital is the way we do it. The Quality Team is here to make sure that we really are providing the great service that our customers deserve. TPO's Quality Team is made up of four members. The Quality Framework has been in place since the start of 2018 and we have been rolling this out across the business.

Every year thousands of people have interactions with TPO, so providing a great customer journey is very important to us. We look at all interactions from customers whether these are in writing or over the phone. We carry out audits that review the end-to-end customer journey including:

- How we introduce ourselves
- Setting expectations
- The thoroughness of our investigation
- How we handle and capture customer information.

During these audits we capture, celebrate and share all best practices as well as customer feedback we receive. Here are a few compliments received from customers in November:

*"Thank you so much for all your hard work, effort and definitely patience with me, especially at these hard times for everyone! Be safe and take care."*

*"Thank you again for your fair and impartial decision."*

*"You are, and have been, so helpful as a contact during this last year. I really have appreciated these emails, indeed I do not know where I would have been without them."*