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First Ombudsman Appointed for Residential Leaseholders

Residential leaseholders have recourse to independent adjudication on disputes through Leasehold Valuation Tribunals and even the Courts but these can be time consuming, costly and often have little jurisdiction over many of the disputes that arise. Complaints relating to matters such as poor communication, not delivering the promise and accounting issues fall into the category of outside the LVT and Court jurisdictions.

As a result, and in line with government policy, the Association of Residential Managing Agents (ARMA) has now made it a requirement that its members must belong to a fully recognised ombudsman scheme. While ARMA members can join the Housing Ombudsman or the Property Ombudsman, the recommended scheme for its members is the Surveyors Ombudsman Service (SOS).

“It was a logical step for us to go for SOS as nearly 50% of our members are Chartered Surveyors and SOS was set up by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors for its members,” comments Brett Williams, ARMA’s chairman. “Furthermore SOS is already handling cases relating to residential leasehold issues.” [See the SOS’ annual report at www.surveyors-ombudsman.org.uk].

In future, leaseholders in properties managed by ARMA members will, after they have gone through the member’s own in-house complaints procedure, be able, at no cost, to take their complaint straight to the ombudsman. If the complaint is found to fall within the ombudsman’s jurisdiction, an entirely independent review of, and decision on, the case will be made. The decision, if accepted by the complainant, is then binding on the member.

“It will now be the independent ombudsman who will investigate the conduct of our members,” concludes Williams, “and will report to us if a member is found to be seriously wanting. We see this step as bringing us to the level of redress that we want to be able to offer to our members’ clients and customers”

Lewis Shand Smith, Chief Ombudsman of SOS, adds: “We are delighted that ARMA has decided that its members should join the Surveyors Ombudsman Service. As a professional ombudsman scheme we are happy to welcome any firm which provides services to the property sector. Our members include Surveyors, Estate Agents, Managing Agents and Letting Agents. In such a difficult economic climate it is essential that we work together with the property industry to give confidence to consumers that if things go wrong, effective independent redress is available.”

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NOTES TO EDITOR

1. Formed in 1991, ARMA is the only body in England and Wales to focus exclusively on matters relating to the block or estate management of long leasehold residential property. With over 225 corporate members managing in excess of 850,000 units in more than 34,000 blocks of flats or estates (at least 60% of which are lessee-controlled properties), the Association's founding principal aims are to represent its members and the interests of lessees, resident management companies and investor freeholders.
2. For further press information contact David Hewett on 020 7622 6123 or david@arma.org.uk