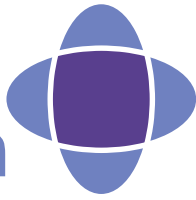
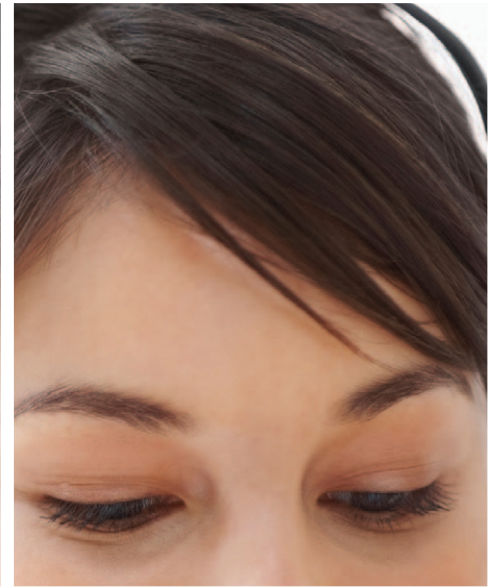


The Furniture
Ombudsman



Annual REVIEW

2010 – 2011



INSPIRING CONSUMER
CONFIDENCE IN THE
FURNITURE AND
HOME IMPROVEMENT
INDUSTRIES



A year at a glance

January TFO attend Interiors show at NEC.

February Furniture & Mirror Warehouse join.

March MJS Interiors join.

April Kevin Grix appointed to WCFM Retail Training Committee.

May Jon Walters joins TFO as Service Delivery Manager. Laura Ashley and csl sofas join.

June TFO produce film for Trading Standards.

July Home of the Sofa join.

August Tesco Stores Limited join.

September TFO respond to Government consultation.

October Bensons for Beds join.

November OFT endorse TFO Payment Protection Scheme.

December TFO mobile site goes live.

Dear Reader



2011 proved to be one of the most important years for The Furniture Ombudsman (TFO) since it was first established by the Office of Fair Trading back in 1992. During the year our membership grew to such a degree that today almost 4,500 furniture and home improvement outlets are covered by TFO. During the last 12 months major high street names including Tesco, Laura Ashley, csl and Bensons for Beds pledged their commitment to our Code of Practice which demonstrates how important The Furniture Ombudsman scheme is regarded. It is pleasing that so many major retailers are taking their responsibilities to consumers seriously – and are using our logo to reassure and inspire confidence. As our pool of members grows, so too does the scope of consumer protection in the furniture and home improvement industries.

An important part of our role is to raise standards through the advice, education and training that we provide our members. In 2011 we expanded our range of courses to include aspects of retail compliance, customer care and employment law. It is clear that our work is helping to reduce consumer detriment. Indeed, our case numbers are at their lowest level for over five years; this, despite an increase in consumer expectations and the growth in our membership. This is a clear indication that our members are working with our advisors to get things right first time. In 2011 our own performance improved too; our lead times on cases are now the best they have been since the service began.

Whether you are a retailer, manufacturer, consumer or an advisor - you can be assured that everyone at The Furniture Ombudsman is committed to continuing our work and improving standards again in 2012 and beyond.

Kind regards



Kevin Grix
Head of The Furniture Ombudsman



TODAY, A FIGURE APPROACHING 4,500 FURNITURE AND HOME IMPROVEMENT OUTLETS ARE COVERED BY MEMBERSHIP OF THE FURNITURE OMBUDSMAN.

“ Thank you for your dedication in chasing up my complaint. I am very grateful for your assistance and intervention with [the retailer] on my complaint. [The retailer] has promptly addressed my issues after you contacted them. ”
Mrs L. (consumer)

Working with our Members

Many of our members have publicised their TFO membership by adding our logo to their marketing literature and websites. Three examples shown below include B&Q, Magnet and Tesco. This raises awareness of the additional protection that TFO membership offers consumer; providing peace-of-mind when purchasing.



“ Our TFO membership means that we have access to a comprehensive range of information and support services aimed at reducing the level of complaints and offering our customers peace-of-mind. ”

Rachel Spence, Director at Home of the Sofa



A PRESS RELEASE WHICH WE ISSUED REGARDING A NEW MEMBER JOINING US, RECEIVED PRESS COVERAGE EQUIVALENT TO £1460 OF ADVERTISING. THIS WAS SUBSTANTIALLY MORE THAN THE AMOUNT THEY PAID FOR THEIR TFO FULL MEMBERSHIP.



TFO in the news

This year press coverage has increased threefold with TFO being mentioned in national, regional, online and trade press.

We will continue to work with our members and the consumer media over the next year to highlight our efforts in inspiring consumer confidence and raising standards within the furniture industry.

Publications we have appeared in this year include: Real Homes, Retail Design, Cabinet Maker, Furniture News, FX Magazine, Kitchen and Bathroom News, Kitchen Bathroom and Bedroom Review, Quality World and Trading Standards Today.



TFO HAVE ADMINISTERED AN OFFICE OF FAIR TRADING ENDORSED PAYMENT PROTECTION SCHEME FOR MEMBERS OF THE HOME IMPROVEMENT INDUSTRY SINCE 1999.

Image courtesy of Laura Ashley

“ We have chosen to join The Furniture Ombudsman as we wanted to show that putting the customer first is highly important to us. ”
Adrian Oates *Managing Director at Peter Green*

TFO - News

MP tour of responsible retailers

Stephen McPartland MP for Stevenage took to the streets of his constituency with TFO's Kevin Grix in October to visit furniture and home improvement retailers who have made a commitment to offer extra reassurance to their consumers by becoming members of The Furniture Ombudsman (TFO). The MP visited Bensons for Beds, Dreams and Laura Ashley, together with B&Q, Homebase and Magnet, who are members of TFO's Home Improvement Payment Protection Scheme. Stephen McPartland MP had particular interest in the tour as he is also the Chair of the All Party

Parliamentary Furniture Group, a forum which discusses the issues affecting the furniture industry in Parliament. He said, "The Furniture Ombudsman works hard to encourage the highest standards of customer service within the furniture industry. The Furniture Ombudsman currently has a pool of members which extends to approximately 4,500 furniture and home improvement outlets in the UK. It is great that the organisation exists to support both the consumer and the furniture industry and I am proud that it is based here in Stevenage."



TFO's Kevin Grix (left) with Stephen McPartland MP

 SINCE 2009 WE HAVE PRODUCED OVER 1000 'SMART' INSPECTION REPORTS FOR CONSUMERS WHO MADE PURCHASES FROM NON-MEMBERS.

 TFO IS NOW USING QR CODES WHICH CAN BE SCANNED BY SMART PHONES TO LINK DIRECTLY TO ITS MOBILE WEBSITE.

A year in review

January

In January we attended the Interiors show at Birmingham NEC, allowing us to speak to many of our members and promote the work of TFO further.

February

We were pleased to welcome Furniture & Mirror Warehouse as Full Members in February. We also established a link with North Herts College to give work experience to local students.

March

March saw MJS Interiors join us as Full Members and Flames Fireplace & Heating Centre (Wakefield) Limited join as Associate Members.

April

In April, Kevin Grix was appointed to the Worshipful Company of Furniture Makers Retail Training Committee – sharing his knowledge of consumer law with others in the industry.

Allders (Croydon) Limited, Associated Independent Stores (AIS), Barrow Clark Complete Home Furnishers Limited, Furniture World (Scotland) Limited and Race for Furniture Limited all joined as Full Members.

May

Laura Ashley, csl sofas, and Glasswells joined us as Full Members, and the TFO team welcomed Jon Walters as Service Delivery Manager.

Adjudicator Natalie Williams joined her TFO colleagues in becoming professionally qualified as an Associate of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators (ACI Arb). Through becoming an Associate, Natalie has made a commitment to the profession of dispute resolution to a standard which is globally recognised.

June (right top)

In June, we worked with ITN productions to create a film explaining our services. The film was shown at the annual Trading Standards Institute conference and can be found on The Furniture Ombudsman website www.thefurnitureombudsman.org.

We attended the conference and spoke to delegates about benefits which The Furniture Ombudsman offers both consumers and retailers.

We also welcomed Ekornes and furniture retailer Peter Green to our list of Full Members.

July

Furniture retailers Home of the Sofa and Fairway Furniture became Full TFO Members.

TFO introduced a new system to send automated text messages and emails to consumers to keep them up to date with the progress of their case.

August

In August, TFO's team of Adjudicators was joined by Judith Turner, a trained and qualified solicitor.

We were pleased to welcome Tesco, Next Kitchens, Factory Direct Kitchens (Inverurie) and Factory Direct Kitchens & Bathrooms (Stonehaven) as Full Members. Tesco later included our logo and words about the scheme on page 8 of their autumn / winter Tesco Direct catalogue.

September

In September we attended the AIS Furniture Show in Solihul where we were able to meet a number of retailers to discuss our service and how we can help inspire consumer confidence.

We responded to a Government consultation on 'Empowering and Protecting Consumers'. We were also pleased to welcome Woods (Dorchester) Limited on board as a Full Member.



October (above)

Bensons for Beds, who have over 300 stores, became Full Members. We were also pleased to welcome Sofas & Stuff Limited to our list of Full Members.

TFO membership growth rises to include around 4,500 stores. We met with the Legal Ombudsman in Birmingham to share best practice and ideas on how to improve service.

November

The Office of Fair Trading renewed their endorsement of The Furniture Ombudsman Payment Protection Scheme for the home improvement industry at a meeting in London.

Smith Bradbeer & Co Ltd, Taskers and Manns of Cranleigh all joined us as Full Members.

December

Our TFO mobile website went live in December. From 2012 retailers can use QR codes in store allowing consumers to gain full information and reassurance on the protection offered by TFO membership.

Our Standards Board expanded to eight individuals, with Ellen Morgan from B&Q and Gordon McClaren from Homebase joining.



IN AUGUST
2011 THE AVERAGE
TIME TAKEN TO SETTLE
A CASE THROUGH OUR
ADR SERVICE WAS
UNDER 100 DAYS.



How we dealt with consumer complaints in 2010/11

Our Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) service is a two stage conciliation and adjudication process that is exclusive to consumers of our registered Full Members.

When an application is received detailing a complaint against one of our registered Full Members, the claim is investigated through our conciliation process. At this stage we may be able to make an early decision on the validity of a claim, recommend or uphold an offer which has already been made prior to our involvement, or negotiate a settlement.

Where a settlement cannot be reached between the parties, we are able to make a formal decision in the form of an adjudication.

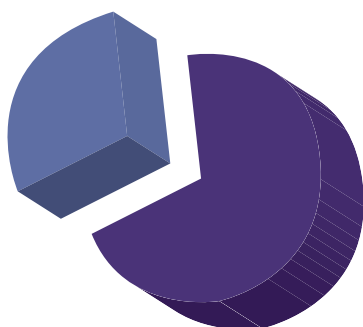
Our figures, taken from the year ending August 2011, show that of all the cases investigated by The Furniture Ombudsman 78% were closed at the conciliation stage and 22% progressed to adjudication. 70% of all complaint applications received in this year were home furnishing complaints and 30% were home improvement installation complaints.

In the cases reviewed during the year, our figures demonstrate that the consumers' claim was either upheld in full or in part in 51% of all cases, and was not upheld in 49% of all cases. To clarify, where a claim is upheld in part, a split decision is made, where some aspects of a claim with multiple issues have been found in favour of the consumer and some have been found in favour of the retailer.

The statistics used in this review relate to the year ending August 2011.

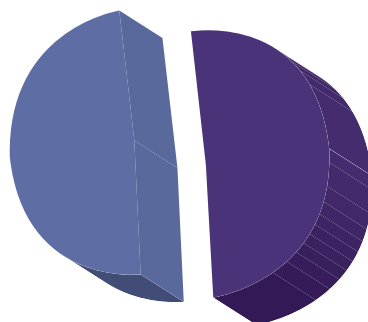
“Many thanks for all your assistance which has been much appreciated. I look forward to [the retailer] contacting me and being able to resolve the problem.”
Mr W. (consumer)

Home Improvement Installations 30%



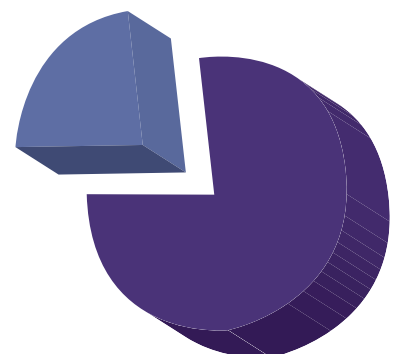
Home Furnishings 70%

Consumers' claim not upheld 49%



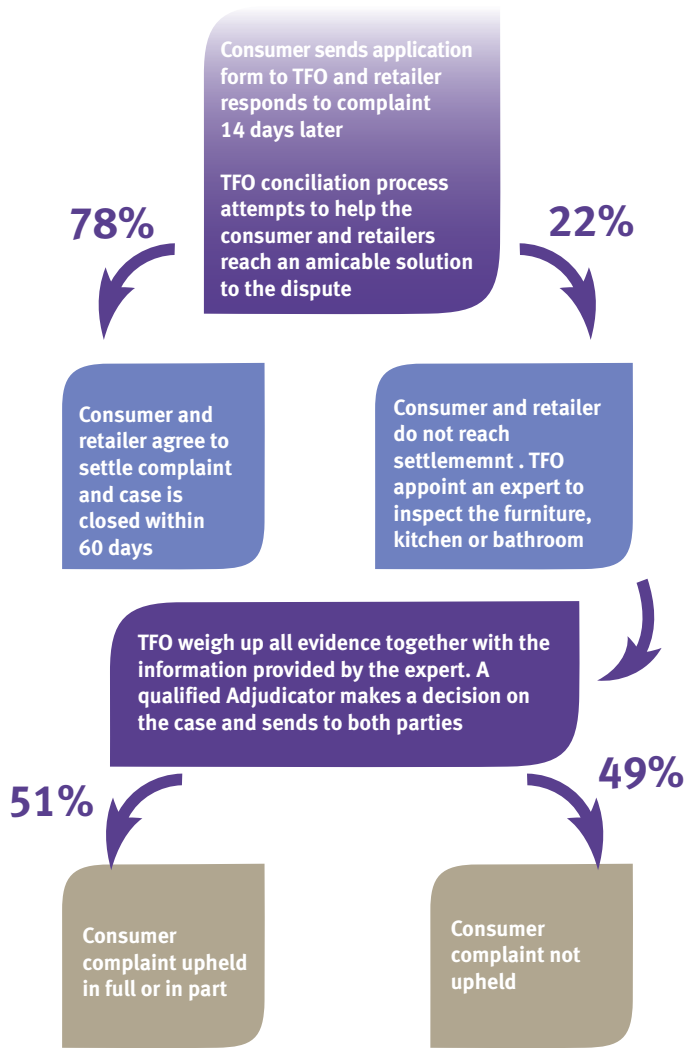
Consumers' claim upheld in full or part 51%

% of cases closed at adjudication stage 22%



% of cases closed at conciliation stage 78%

TFO consumer journey



- Day 1
- Day 10
- Day 20
- Day 30
- Day 40
- Day 50
- Day 60
- Day 70
- Day 80
- Day 90
- Day 100



APPROXIMATELY
1,300 COMPLAINTS
WERE INVESTIGATED
THROUGH OUR ADR
SERVICE IN THE YEAR
ENDING AUGUST 2011

“ We want the whole experience of buying a product from us to be a pleasurable one - from start to finish – and working with The Furniture Ombudsman will help ensure this. ”

Patrick O'Connor,

Operations Director at
Fairway Furniture



TFO Full Members 2010/11

- Allders (Croydon) Limited*
- Amwell Kitchens Limited
- Anglia Home Furnishings (AHF) Limited
- Arthur Jenkins Furniture Centre
- Ashbrooks (House Furnishers) Limited
- Ashley Anderson
- Associated Independent Stores Limited*
- B&Q Plc
- Backchairs Direct Limited
- Bainton Flooring
- Banburys Limited
- Barker & Stonehouse Limited
- Barrow Clark Complete House Furnishers Limited*
- Beadle & Crome (Reading) Limited
- Bentalls of Kingston
- Bensons for Beds*
- Biddiscombes
- Bretts of Ipswich Limited
- Carters Furniture Centre Limited
- Chelmsford Star Co-Operative Society Limited
- Cloisters Design Limited
- Collective Design Limited
- Contract Kitchens (New Milton) Limited
- Cousins Furniture Stores Limited
- CRC Contracts Flooring Limited
- Crimson Interiors Limited
- csl sofas*
- Danetti
- David Neville Limited
- DFS Furniture Company Plc
- Dickinsons Furnishers Limited
- Discount Warehouse (Totton) Limited
- Dream World
- Dreams Plc
- Duresta Upholstery Limited
- E & A Wates Limited
- E Langton & Co Limited
- Ekornes Ltd*
- Elite Bedding Company Limited
- Eyres of Chesterfield Limited
- Factory Direct Kitchens & Bathrooms (Stonehaven) Limited*
- Factory Direct Kitchens (Inverurie) Limited*
- Fenwick (Brent Cross) limited
- Fishpools Limited
- Fords (Oakham) Limited
- Frank Hudson Limited
- Frasers House Furnishers (Ellon) Limited
- Furniture & Mirror Warehouse*
- Furniture Factors Limited
- Furniture Superstore Limited
- Furniture Village Plc
- Furniture World (Scotland) Limited*
- Glasswells Limited*
- Golden Nights Bed Company
- Hammonds Furniture Limited
- Harding & Sons*
- Heal & Son Limited
- Herbet Lewis (Drapers & Furnishers) Limited
- Hitachi Capital Consumer Finance
- Holmes Hill Furniture Limited*
- Home of The Sofa Limited*
- Homebase Limited
- House of Fraser
- Hunters (Derby) Limited
- Imaggio Interiors Limited
- J Scott (Marchwiel) Limited
- Julian Foye
- Kutchenhaus Limited
- Laura Ashley Limited*
- Leather Doctor Services Limited
- Leekes Limited
- Lenleys
- Lima Kitchens Limited
- Living Homes
- Macdonalds (York) Limited
- Magnet Limited
- Maitlands
- Marks & Spencer Plc
- Marriotts House Furnishers Limited
- Mathesons of Oban
- Midas House Furnishers Limited
- Mills (Herne Bay) Limited
- Milners
- Mister Smith Interiors
- MJS Interiors*
- Natural Bed Company
- Natuzzi Services Limited
- Next Kitchens*
- NTP Kitchens & Joinery Limited
- Park Furnishers Limited
- Paul Glover Furniture Limited
- Peter Adams (Watford) Limited
- Peter Betteridge (Furnishers) Limited
- Peter Green*
- Philpotts of Hitchin
- Plumbs Limited
- Ponsford Limited
- Purves Two Limited
- Quilters Limited
- Race For Furniture Limited*
- Rainbow Carpets (Welling) Limited
- Randalls of Uxbridge Limited
- Rich Sofas & interiors Limited
- Ronald G Johnston Limited
- Roomes Stores Limited
- Roset (UK) Limited
- Rosevears Furnishers Limited
- Showcom Limited (aka K2Go)
- Sinclair's First for Furniture
- Smeg (UK) Limited
- Sofas & Stuff Limited
- Southon & Co Limited
- Stevens of Pitlochry
- Stroud Furniture Makers
- Sturtons & Tappers Furnishings
- Tesco Stores Limited*
- The Contract Chair Company
- The Leather Studio
- The Sitting Room
- The Sofa Workshop Limited
- UBM Information Ltd
- Uniquemade Limited
- W Boyes & Co (Eastfield) Limited
- W Vasey & Son (Carlisle) Limited
- Wallace King Interiors Limited
- Ward Brothers (Furnishers) Limited
- Wells Carpets Brokers Limited
- Wesley Barrell (Witney) Limited
- Wickes Building Supplies Limited
- Willowbrook Limited
- WM Black & Son Limited
- Wood Bros (Furniture) Limited
- Woods (Dorchester) Limited*
- Worcester Furniture Exhibition Centre

*New Members for 2011

TFO Associate Members 2010/11

- Alexander Christian Limited
- At Home with Gimbles
- Blazes Logistics
- British Beds Worldwide Limited
- C Harris & Son (Fleet) Limited
- Chrysties Furnishing Centre
- Cloverley Soft Furnishings Limited
- Clovestar Limited
- Custom Carpentry
- Everest Limited
- Factory Beds Direct
- Flames Fireplace & Heating Centre (Wakefield) Limited*
- HCS Independent Carpet Inspectors
- Heico Fasteners UK Limited
- Holmes Bros Furnishers Limited
- JB Global Limited
- La Source
- Leisurewood Furniture Limited
- Light Rock Limited
- Mattressnextday.co.uk
- New-Life Interiors
- Norman Furnishings
- North Wales Beds
- Sofa & Home Limited
- TC Group
- The Bed & Suite Centre*
- The Ideal Suite Factory Limited

*New Members for 2011