



Zahida Manzoor CBE
Commissioner

PRESS NOTICE

10 JULY 2007

RELEASE OF LSCC ANNUAL REPORT – “CYCLE OF CHANGE”

Today the Legal Services Complaints Commissioner, Zahida Manzoor CBE, releases her third Annual Report, ‘Cycle of Change’, covering the period 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007.

The Commissioner said:

“People often access legal services when they are at their most vulnerable. It is essential, therefore, that anyone who complains to the Law Society’s Legal Complaints Service or Solicitors Regulation Authority has their complaint concluded quickly and fairly.”

In the year 2006/7 the Law Society’s Legal Complaints Service (LCS) and the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) closed 20,364 complaints supported by a complaints handling budget of £36 million.

Speaking about the LCS and SRA performance in complaints handling, the Commissioner said:

“In general, there has been mixed performance against the Plan this year. I welcome the improvements in how quickly complaints are handled and the effort that has gone into achieving this, which is good news for the consumer.

“However, any improvements in the time it takes to handle complaints have to be viewed within the context of a poorer performance in the area of quality. It concerns me that some complaints are not being handled in line with the Law Society’s own policies. It is important that quality accompanies timeliness, and any shortcomings

here are improved to impact on the overall service being provided to the consumer and the profession.”

On 12 June 2007 the Commissioner wrote to the Law Society’s LCS and SRA notifying them that they had missed a number of the targets she had set for 2006/07 and advising them of her provisional decision that the LCS and SRA have not handled complaints in accordance with the Plan submitted to her. The Commissioner has provided the LCS and SRA with an opportunity to provide representation to her, before giving her final decision on whether complaints have been handled in accordance with the Plan, whether to levy a penalty and if so, at what level.

The Commissioner also holds the Office of the Legal Services Ombudsman (OLSO) for England and Wales, and the Annual Report for that Office was published on 19 June 2007.

Further information and copies of Annual Reports can be found on the OLSCC website www.olsc.gov.uk and the OLSO website www.OLSO.org.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. Ms Manzoor CBE was appointed Legal Services Complaints Commissioner in February 2004 in addition to her role as Legal Services Ombudsman (LSO). The Commissioner only has powers in relation to the Law Society of England and Wales. Ms Manzoor was reappointed as both Commissioner and LSO for a period of three years in March 2006.
2. The roles of the LSO and the Commissioner are distinct. The LSO examines the handling of individual complaints by the professional bodies on behalf of members of the public. The Commissioner examines the Law Society's capability to handle complaints made about its members efficiently and effectively.
3. The Commissioner has the power under section 52 of the Access to Justice Act 1999 to require the Law Society to provide information on how it deals with complaints, to make recommendations about the complaints system, to set targets for complaints handling, and require the Law Society to submit a plan for improved complaints handling. In addition, the Commissioner has the power to levy a penalty on the Law Society if it fails to deliver an adequate plan or fails in the delivery of that plan.
4. In January 2006 the Law Society formally split into three distinct bodies, each one with its own Chief Executive and in the case of the Legal Complaints Service (LCS) and the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA), their own Board. The Law Society has its Council and a Corporate Governance Board. The three bodies are:
 - LCS, formerly the Consumer Complaints Service, continues to deal with complaints by consumers who are complaining about the service received from their solicitor;
 - SRA regulates solicitors and deals with some consumer complaints where misconduct of a solicitor is alleged; and
 - The Law Society represents solicitors to help protect and promote their work.
5. The Commissioner's third Annual Report, 'Cycle of Change', was released on 10 July 2007. The Report covers:
 - the Commissioner's provisional decision on the LCS and SRA's performance against their Improvement Plan for the period 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007;
 - the Commissioner's decision on the adequacy of the LCS and SRA Improvement Plan for the period 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008; and
 - details of the proposed wider business improvements set out in the LCS and SRA's Improvement Plan for the period 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008.
6. For enquiries please contact Janice Revill, tel: 0113 2615 449.

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