

**Office of the Legal Services Complaints
Commissioner**

**Our Business Plan
2009-2010**

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Commissioner's foreword

I am pleased to present the Office of the Legal Services Complaints Commissioner (OLSCC) Business Plan 2009-2010. The plan states our high level objectives for the next twelve months and describes how we will achieve them.

The Lord Chancellor announced on 19 February 2009 my reappointment as Legal Services Complaints Commissioner for England and Wales. I will continue in this role until the OLSCC closes in 2010.

The Legal Services Act 2007 establishes a new regime for handling complaints about legal services. When the Legal Services Board (LSB), as the overarching regulator, and the Office for Legal Complaints (OLC), as the complaints handling body, become fully operational the Law Society's current arrangements for handling complaints will cease. Having helped the Law Society improve its complaints handling the time is now right for my role as its regulator to end.

The Lord Chancellor in his statement recognised the very valuable service that the OLSCC has provided over the past four years. He said:

"I am delighted that Zahida Manzoor has accepted reappointment to both her roles. She has always demonstrated a strong commitment to protecting and promoting the interests of consumers of legal services.

Zahida has achieved significant improvements to the Law Society's complaints handling in the last few years, both in speed of performance and quality of service.

The principal beneficiary of these improvements is the consumer. It is paramount that this momentum continues as we enter the transition phase towards the new regime provided by the Legal Services Act 2007."

In order to maintain the momentum the Lord Chancellor has amended my powers to reflect what needs to be achieved during my office's final year of operation - to provide a continuing oversight of the Law Society to ensure that performance does not slip before the handover to the OLC.

One of my priorities will therefore be to continue to work closely with the Legal Complaints Service to ensure that any legacy work to be passed to the OLC is within acceptable limits. As a result I have set targets and made recommendations for the Law Society that focus on timeliness and on reducing the work in progress.

My other key priority is to work closely with Ministry of Justice (MoJ) teams to appropriately plan so that my office closes by 31 March 2010. I have been working with my own Senior Management Team to identify the priority areas of work that will enable my office to continue to appropriately monitor the performance of the Law Society through to 31 December 2009. I have developed a Business Transition Plan in agreement with MoJ that sets out the resources required to complete the work of my office.

I will be working with MoJ to support my staff in securing their future employment at an appropriate point that meets the needs of the business.

I am pleased that the experience and skills of my staff has been recognised by other employers and that many have already successfully moved onto equally demanding roles.

I look forward to the challenges that this year will bring and look to successfully deliver the programme of work set out in this Business Plan.

Zahida Manzoor CBE

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Zahida P. Manzoor." The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent underline under the first name.

Legal Services Complaints Commissioner

Supporting MoJ strategic objectives

The OLSCC is an independent statutory office and an Associate Office of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). It operates its finance and HR related work in accordance with the rules and policies of MoJ.

Supporting MoJ objectives

The MoJ has four Departmental Strategic Objectives (DSO). These objectives are:

DSO 1: Strengthening democracy, rights and responsibilities

DSO 2: Delivering fair and simple routes to civil and family justice

DSO3 - Protect the public and reduce reoffending

DSO4 - Ensure a more effective, transparent and responsive criminal justice system for victims and the public

As an Associate Office of the Access to Justice Directorate (A2J) within the MoJ, we support these objectives by helping A2J to increase the focus on the needs of the public. In particular, through our role as an independent regulator, we will work with the Law Society to improve and maintain standards in complaints handling to increase:

- access to justice; and
- confidence in the justice system.

Our mission, vision and values

Our mission

Our mission is to regulate the Law Society, to ensure that it handles complaints about its members effectively and efficiently, providing consumers with a fair and prompt quality service.

We will do this by positively influencing and supporting the Law Society, and work fairly, openly and honestly with it and all our stakeholders, as an organisation committed to quality and with the consumer and practitioner's needs informing the scope of our business.

Our vision

Our vision is to:

- secure a Law Society complaints process that provides a fair and prompt quality service to the consumers of legal services, and
- be an organisation that consumers, stakeholders and our staff can have confidence in and be proud of.

Our values

We shall:

- ensure that we are independent and impartial in our decisions, working with honesty, integrity and fairness;
- ensure we are a quality employer, supporting professional development and training to help staff meet business goals and objectives;
- have a culture that is open, builds trust, and encourages personal responsibility; and
- ensure that the interests and diversity of all those we work with are respected.

Our stakeholders

The following groups of people have an interest in our work and its outcomes:

- **consumers**, who use legal services, organisations that represent them, and the general public who may be future users of legal services or affected by the way legal services are delivered,
- **the Law Society, the LCS and the SRA, and Law Society members**, who have a role in regulating and delivering legal services,
- **other professional bodies and their members**,
- **Parliament**, to whom we are accountable, through the laying of the Annual Report by the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice,
- **other related organisations**, such as other regulators and ombudsman services with whom we co-operate and share good practice,
- **staff**, in MoJ and those working in the OLSCC on whose skills, knowledge and experience we rely,
- **our Advisory and Consumer Board** which supports us in setting targets for the Law Society's complaints handling, and assists in the assessment of complaint handling plans of the Law Society,
- **OLC and LSB**, as they develop following the introduction of the Legal Service Act 2007,
- **the Ministry of Justice**, as our parent body.

Our strategic objectives

OLSCC will continue to work closely with the Law Society, the LCS and the SRA in 2009-2010 to help ensure that further improvements are made in their complaints handling process to benefit both consumers of legal services and the legal profession.

We aim to:

- work in partnership with the Law Society
- provide evidence based analysis and feedback
- be guided by the principles of the Better Regulation Executive¹ and be proportionate, accountable, consistent, transparent and targeted in the service we provide to the Law Society, and to always give full reasons for our decisions;
- work with and monitor the LCS and the SRA's performance in complaints handling and to protect the interests of consumers and other stakeholders during transition to the new structures provided by the Legal Services Act 2007;
- ensure transparency, openness and impartiality
- build improvements in our own performance
- foster open and honest communication;
- provide value for money

¹ The Better Regulation Executive is part of the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR).

Our priorities and objectives for 2009-2010

The focus for 2009-2010 will be to provide a continuing oversight of the Law Society to ensure that there is no slippage in performance regarding the timeliness of complaint handling and in reducing the work in progress during the transition period before the handover to the OLC. With the OLSCC closing by end of March 2010 there is also the need to ensure that MoJ support staff in obtaining suitable alternative employment within MoJ or elsewhere.

Objective 1 Improve the Law Society performance

We will continue to encourage the Law Society's to sustain the improvements achieved in its performance by monitoring results. To achieve this, our relationship with the Law Society, the LCS and the SRA will continue to be productive. We will encourage them to take responsibility to ensure that the LCS:

- delivers appropriate timeliness in the complaints handled; and
- manages its stock of complaints in progress at an effective level.

Objective 2 Transition Planning

We will work closely with those MoJ teams who are responsible for supporting our staff into moving to new posts. We will maintain and revise our Business Transition Plan in line with staff changes and in order to enable OLSCC to continue to meet its business objectives during this period.

Objective 3 Budget and internal controls

We will produce fully audited annual accounts through to office closedown that show prudent financial performance against the forecasts. We will also appropriately dispose of the office's assets on closure.

Objective 4 Communications

We will keep stakeholders informed of our work and the progress of the LCS and the SRA's performance and where appropriate update them on our closure. We will update our website to show the reported complaints handling performance of the Law Society.

Advisory and Consumer Board and communications

We will hold at least two Advisory and Consumer Board meetings. Board members are independent and bring a wide range of experiences and skills to the work of the Commissioner. They assist the Commissioner in assessing appropriate levels of performance; identifying good practice; and advising on a suitable work programme.

Their independent advice is in line with the recommendations of the Better Regulation Executive. The final meeting of the Board in 2009 will be used to review and conclude its work.

In the past those with an interest in our work have had a real opportunity to share their views with us and be able to participate in shaping our ideas and work plans. As we enter our final year of operations we will continue to offer these opportunities up until the end of December 2009 when our regulatory role ends. We will continue to signpost consumers to the appropriate bodies that can answer their questions

Our website will be used to provide information on the Law Society's performance and relevant statistics will be published regularly. Following closure of this office, the website will be archived and will not be updated but will remain available to be viewed.

Improving the way we work

Service Standards

We will continue to provide information on the OLSCC's work to our parent department, the MoJ, and will regularly update our other stakeholders and consumers, through publications such as our Annual Report and the OLSCC website. We will make sure that the information we publish through these channels is accurate, useful and accessible to all. Following the closure of OLSCC, the website will be archived and accessible for viewing but will not be updated.

We will continue to work to the principles of Chartermark² to demonstrate our commitment to improved customer service. We will review and act upon the feedback we receive, to maintain and improve the service standards that consumers, the Law Society and stakeholders should expect from us.

Risk management

We will continue to manage risk throughout 2009-2010. Risk management is incorporated into OLSCC's day-to-day activities and forward planning. Significant risks to and arising from the work of OLSCC are reported to the Director General, Access to Justice at the MoJ on a quarterly basis. Where necessary, such risks and the actions to mitigate risk are escalated and incorporated into the MOJ's Corporate Risk Register for consideration by the Corporate Management Board.

Control framework

We will continue to ensure that we have effective systems of control in place to enable the delivery of an efficient and effective service. Key elements in the OLSCC control systems are:

- business planning;
- comprehensive budgeting systems with an annual budget, periodic and annual financial reports that indicate performance against the forecasts;
- a Business Continuity Plan for OLSCC, which is refined to ensure that key activities can continue effectively following any disruption;
- team briefings and staff events;
- security systems and reporting;
- suitably managing resources in the light of office closure, including the releasing of staff in a controlled manner;
- performance management, and
- recognition and reward.

² Charter Mark is the UK Government's national standard for excellence in customer service.

People, Performance and Learning

People and Learning

In 2009-2010, in line with Investors in People³ principles, OLSCC will continue to provide development opportunities for all staff. These will be in line with MoJ HR policies and will utilise support from the MoJ's learning and development team, the JusticeAcademy. The focus will be on MoJ providing appropriate support and training to maintain effective delivery of the business and also to support staff in obtaining alternative employment prior to closure.

Reward and Recognition

We will continue to use our Reward and Recognition Scheme to encourage and reward excellence within the organisation, and to ensure our staff contribute fully to the achievement of our business objectives.

Diversity

We will continue to actively promote and respect diversity both within the organisation and in the wider environment. Individual members of OLSCC will continue to actively participate in a number of staff network groups across MoJ such as:

- Proud Network, (People from diverse Racial Origins Uniting the Department) which is committed to eliminating discrimination in the workplace, promoting equality of opportunity and creating a diverse workforce.
- Rainbow Network, which provides a safe environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgendered (LGBT) staff and heterosexual friends from the MoJ family,
- Carers Network, which was set up to support staff with disabilities, and
- Women's Issues Network (WIN) which addresses women's issues and concerns within the department.

³ The Investors in People (IIP) Standard is a business improvement tool designed to advance an organisation's performance through its people. MoJ, including OLSCC, has been granted IIP status.

Health and Safety

We will continue to ensure that staff and visitors work in a safe and healthy environment and that the OLSCC meets all health and safety regulations and requirements. Regular risk assessments, workplace inspections and audits in line with MoJ Health and Safety policies will continue to be conducted to eliminate or mitigate risk and maintain the highest standards of safety for everyone.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Key Performance Indicator 1

Maintaining improved complaints handling for consumers

We will influence the performance of the Law Society to sustain improvements to its handling of consumer complaints.

Targets:

- We will provide a continuing oversight of the Law Society to ensure that performance is maintained in the run up to the handover to the Office for Legal Complaints.
- We will set targets related to timeliness and reducing the work in progress to ensure the Law Society's performance is of an appropriate standard.
- We will monitor, report and evaluate the Law Society's progress against the targets set for it by the Commissioner, identifying any trends and commenting as appropriate.
- We will monitor the Law Society's non-statutory plan and comment as appropriate.
- We will continue to share up to date complaints handling performance information with key stakeholders.

Critical success factors

Maintaining improved complaints handling for consumers

- setting clear and reasonable targets to maintain improved complaints handling performance by the Law Society.
- monitoring and evaluating the Law Society's performance against the Commissioner's targets for 2009.

Key Performance Indicator 2

Closure Planning

We will effectively plan and implement arrangements for the closure of OLSCC. We will work closely with the MoJ teams who are responsible for supporting staff into moving to new posts, whilst still enabling OLSCC to continue to meet its business objectives during this period.

Targets:

- We will develop and maintain a Business Transition Plan that will meet MoJ HR requirements, meet business objectives and support the redeployment of staff.
- We will liaise with the MoJ teams responsible for supporting staff in moving into new posts during transition and up to closure. Throughout this period the application of MoJ's and wider Civil Service HR policies will be appropriately applied.
- We will support MoJs activities in finding alternative employment opportunities for our staff and we will communicate with staff regularly throughout this process.

Critical success factors

Managed closure of the office

In conjunction with the MoJ Closure Project Board we will use suitable plans to ensure that staff are redeployed at appropriate points through to and after closure whilst maintaining business continuity.

Key Performance Indicator 3

Living within the budget

We will continue to provide a value for money service by living within our budget for 2009-2010 and adhering to MoJ financial rules.

Targets:

- We will manage our budget accurately and effectively to ensure that we remain within our budget for 2009-2010.
- We will adhere to MoJ financial rules and will report monthly against our budget to MoJ by the second week of the following month.
- We will appropriately dispose of all office assets by the date of closure.

- We will, by July 2009, make an Annual Report to the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, to be laid before Parliament.
- By the point of closure we will provide a final set of accounts available for audit by the National Audit Office.

Critical success factors

Budget

We will ensure that we adhere to MoJ financial rules, provide a value for money service and live within our budget.

Key Performance Indicator 4 Communications

We will ensure that we keep all interested parties informed of our work and the progress made to improve legal complaints handling by the Law Society, the LCS and the SRA. We will also ensure that information related to OLSCC is made available to stakeholders beyond the closure of the office by agreeing an appropriate strategy with MoJ regarding archiving our website and other suitable information.

Targets:

- We will produce an OLSCC Annual Report 2009-2010 which details the work we have undertaken during the year and how our work has concluded
- We will provide stakeholders with regular communications and reports on both the work of OLSCC and the performance of the LCS and the SRA;
- At office closure we will ensure an archive record of suitable information related to the work of the office is available to stakeholders.

Critical success factors

Effective communication with all our stakeholders

We will have a website and communication products and pathways that allow us to communicate effectively with all our stakeholders and interested parties in our work.

How to contact us

Address

The Office of the Legal Services Complaints Commissioner,
19th Floor, West Riding House,
67 Albion Street,
Leeds,
West Yorkshire,
LS1 5AA

Telephone

Our consumer helpline
0845 456 5150

Our office switchboard
0113 261 5420

E-mail

Info@olscc.gov.uk

Website

www.olscc.gov.uk