



**Zahida Manzoor CBE**  
Commissioner



INVESTORS IN PEOPLE

## Office of the Legal Services Complaints Commissioner

### PRESS NOTICE

#### LAW SOCIETY'S COMPLAINTS HANDLING PLAN DECLARED ADEQUATE

The Legal Services Complaints Commissioner, Zahida Manzoor CBE, has today declared the Law Society's complaints handling Plan for the period 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008 as adequate.

The agreement of a plan follows a period of detailed discussions between the Office of the Legal Services Complaints Commissioner and the Law Society.

Ms Manzoor commented:

"I believe the greater collaborative approach adopted by the Law Society this year has been fundamental to producing a complaints handling Plan for 2007/08, which not only focuses on improving the processes and procedures of the Law Society but more importantly its wider business improvements."

The Commissioner asked the Law Society to include in its Plan the key deliverables from the Legal Complaints Service and Solicitors Regulation Authority Improvement Agendas. She believes that they are critical to developing an effective and efficient complaints handling system.

• Impartiality • Transparency • Efficiency • Effective remedy •

Appointed under the Access to Justice Act 1999 as an independent regulator working with the Law Society on behalf of the consumer to improve standards in complaints handling

Speaking of the Plan the Commissioner stated:

“This is the first year I can recall where the Law Society has committed to delivering wider business improvements which better serve the needs of all its users and I look forward during the Plan year to seeing the potential benefits being realised for the consumer, profession and the Law Society.”

However, the Commissioner also sounded a note of caution in agreeing the Plan by pointing out the importance of the Law Society being more proactive in managing performance against the targets and delivery of its Plan earlier in the year.

The Commissioner added:

“Since I was appointed as Commissioner two years ago a reactive approach by the Law Society has resulted in effort being made during the latter part of the year once there has been realisation that some targets are unlikely to be met. This approach has been unsatisfactory and would not be acceptable in future years.”

The Commissioner also pointed out that this is a Plan and sets out what the Law Society hopes to achieve throughout the year. If delivered, the Plan will bring about long awaited improvements for consumers.

Finally, the Commissioner added:

“With the proposals for the new Office for Legal Complaints, although not envisaged to be in place until 2010, it is imperative that a step change in the handling of complaints by the Law Society is made to ensure improvements are delivered sooner. ”

## **Notes to Editors**

1. Ms Manzoor CBE was appointed Legal Services Complaints Commissioner (the 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 legal 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. On 4 October 2006 the Commissioner formally required a plan from the Law Society, setting out how it would deliver improvements in its complaints handling service during the period 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008. The Commissioner set targets on 21 December 2006 covering timeliness, quality of decisions and implementation of its Plan.
5. The targets set by the Commissioner and contained in the Law Society's Plan for the period 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008 include:

### **Timeliness**

- By the end of March 2008, to have no more than 65 cases that have been open for 12 months or more; and
- 67% of cases are closed within 3 months

### **Quality of decisions**

- 93 % of complaints are acknowledged with 5 working days of receipt;
- 88% of complaints receive a substantive response within 45 days of receipt
- 88% of complaints to meet the specified contact requirements; and
- 73% or more of referrals to the Legal Services Ombudsman (LSO) in which the LSO upholds the handling of the case by the Law Society.

### **Implementing the Law Society's agreed Plan**

- The Law Society will use at least 95% of its authorised budget to deliver the content of the Plan; and
- The Law Society will use at least 95% of its authorised resource to deliver the content of the Plan

6. The Law Society submitted its final complaints handling Plan on 3 April 2006 in which it had agreed to the targets set by the Commissioner.
7. Additional information on the targets and text from the letter to the Commissioner notifying the Law Society that its Plan is adequate for complaints handling will be available on the Commissioner's website shortly, [www.olsc.gov.uk](http://www.olsc.gov.uk)
8. The Commissioner is yet to make her decision on the Law Society's performance against its complaints handling Plan for the period 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007.
9. For enquiries please contact Marie Craven, tel: 0113 2615446.

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