

THE COMMISSIONER'S TARGETS FOR COMPLAINTS HANDLING BY THE LAW SOCIETY FOR THE PERIOD 1 APRIL 2008 TO 31 MARCH 2009

In accordance with section 52(2)(d) and 52(2)(c) of the Access to Justice Act 1999, I am setting targets and making recommendations which will help towards the effective and efficient handling of complaints by the Law Society for the period 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009. I require the Law Society to submit a Plan for the handling of complaints about its members in England and Wales and expect that the Law Society will include these targets and address the recommendations. This Plan is due to be submitted to me by 5 March 2008 and should be directed to achieving performance levels in line with the targets and timeframes set.

This letter specifically relates to the work of the Law Society's Legal Complaints Service (LCS); I am writing separately in respect of the work of the Solicitors Regulation Authority.

I am grateful to LCS for its ongoing dialogue and close working with my Office, its input during the development of the targets work and your comments received on 25 January to my proposals for the targets. I am pleased that LCS has found the target areas I have proposed as appropriate and that it is broadly in agreement with the levels at which I have set them. I have taken into consideration all the information provided to me by LCS. Where alternative proposals have been suggested, and the information accompanying them is relevant to the targets, the changes I considered necessary to reflect this information are included. The detail behind my considerations is included as an Annex to the final targets document.

I am now in receipt of LCS' response of 31 January to the issues I raised in my Special Report into the handling by LCS of complaints under the Coal Health Compensation Scheme. I will consider this response carefully, together with your comments on the target I set in that Report which LCS has said I will receive by 8 February. I will then consider whether further targets are necessary. I will expect any targets set to be included in the Law Society's plan for handling complaints referred to above.

I have already shared my concerns with LCS that it has not been able to develop its own quality measure for the 2008/09 plan year. LCS (formerly the Consumer Complaints Service) proposed developing this as far back as 2004. Four years on, LCS is still without what I consider to be an essential tool for its business. I would encourage LCS to address this. It has, therefore, been necessary to use the quality target developed and baselined by my Office's audit in June 2007. Another key business requirement that dates back to 2004 was for LCS to be able to set out fully the benefits it expects to realise from its improvement initiatives and how these will be measured. When I made my target proposals I requested sufficient assurance on this. Only then could I consider whether it was more appropriate to set a target specific to benefits realisation. Whilst LCS has described a number of initiatives, it is not possible to measure the benefits to be realised and set a related target. In the absence of this, the current target relating to the delivery of initiatives remains.

My key priorities for improving complaints handling for the consumer and the profession focus on improving quality and efficiency whilst further improving and sustaining timeliness. My targets are set in order to enable LCS to become an effective and efficient complaints handler. It is not there yet. I have already said that for the complaints handling arms of the Law Society, the 1 April 2008 marks its fourth plan year towards achieving an improved complaints handling service. LCS now needs to drive up performance in key areas such as quality and reducing the overall cost of complaints handling if it is to move towards becoming more effective and efficient.

During this target development and setting process I have taken a number of stakeholder views into consideration including those of LCS. I view the targets I have set as being reasonable, realistic and achievable. I believe they will assist LCS towards delivering the complaints handling service the consumer and profession expects and I will continue in my support for the achievements of LCS against these priorities.

I look forward to receiving the Law Society's Plan on 5 March. In the meantime if there are any points you wish to discuss please do not hesitate to contact me.