



Zahida Manzoor CBE
Commissioner

PRESS NOTICE

22 DECEMBER 2006

TARGETS SET FOR THE LAW SOCIETY'S COMPLAINTS HANDLING 2007/2008

The Legal Services Complaints Commissioner, Zahida Manzoor CBE, has today announced the targets she has set in relation to the handling of complaints about members of the Law Society for the period 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008.

In determining the targets, the Commissioner said:

“I have been pleased with the constructive work between my Office and the Law Society which has led up to the setting of these targets and am grateful to the Law Society for its input.”

The Commissioner has set achievable targets in three key areas to bring performance of the Law Society to a level that moves it closer towards effective and efficient complaints handling.

The first of these areas is improving the speed with which complaints are handled by the Law Society. One of the targets is that by the end of March 2008, there should be no more than 65 cases that have been open for 12 months or more.

In setting this target, the Commissioner stated:

“Where a complaint is simply about the poor service received from a solicitor, consumers should not be expected to have to wait more than 12 months to have their case concluded. However, where a complaint needs investigation into the conduct of a solicitor it is reasonable to expect some of these cases to take longer to ensure the

right outcome for both the consumer and the profession. Therefore, I have acknowledged that up to 65 conduct cases could take a little longer than 12 months to conclude.”

Improving the quality of complaints handling by the Law Society continues to be a priority area. In order to deliver improvements in this area the Commissioner has set a range of targets. One is that the Law Society must share guidance on levels of financial redress with the consumer and solicitor in at least 85% of cases.

Speaking about this, the Commissioner commented:

“I am disappointed that the Indicative Target Audit carried out by my Office in October 2006 shows that in only two thirds (67%) of cases did the Law Society share guidance on levels of financial redress with the consumer and solicitor.

“It is imperative that the consumer and solicitor have access to this information so that they can each make an informed decision about any offer of compensation to the consumer.”

The Commissioner has also set the Law Society a target that 88% of consumers receive a substantive response within 45 days of receipt of the complaint.

Commenting on this, the Commissioner added:

“This target does not require the complaint to be investigated, it only requires the Law Society to accurately identify and communicate all the issues, specific to the consumer’s individual circumstances to enable the complaint to progress. It is not unreasonable for a consumer to expect to receive this letter within a month and a half.”

The final area where the Commissioner is driving for improvement is in the Law Society’s financial and resource management, and its ability to implement change.

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. In establishing the Commissioner's targets for 2007/08 the following areas have been considered:
 - The findings from audits undertaken by the Office of the Legal Services Complaints Commissioner, including the most recent Indicative Targets Audit in October 2006;
 - The Law Society's performance and delivery against all elements of its Plan over the 6 month period 1 April 2006 to 30 September 2006;
 - The Law Society's capability to improve;
 - The Law Society's internal restructuring for complaints handling;
 - Relevant data, management information and detail on measures provided by the Law Society;
 - Consultation with the Law Society on the targets for 2007/08
4. On 4 October 2006, the Commissioner requested an improvement plan from the Law Society for the period 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008. If a plan is submitted to the Commissioner by the Law Society, and agreed as adequate by the Commissioner, when assessing the Law Society's handling of complaints in accordance with this plan, greatest weight will be given to performance and action against the Commissioner's targets and recommendations.
5. The paper setting out the targets for complaints handling by the Law Society will be published on the Commissioner's website www.olsc.gov.uk
6. For enquiries please contact Marie Craven, tel: 0113 2615446.

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