



Legal Services
Complaints
Commissioner

Actions Not Words

Consumers matter

Legal Services Complaints Commissioner's
Annual Report and Accounts 2005–2006.



**Annual Report and Accounts of the Legal Services
Complaints Commissioner 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006**

Laid before Parliament by the Lord Chancellor pursuant to paragraph 5(4)
of Schedule 8 of the Access to Justice Act 1999

Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed 11 July 2006

Contents

	Page Number
Commissioner's Foreword	6
Executive Summary	8
Chapter 1 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006 – The year in perspective	18
Chapter 2 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006 – The Law Society's progress	24
Chapter 3 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006 – The Law Society's operating environment	44
Chapter 4 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006 – The Law Society's delivery against its improvement Plan	50
Chapter 5 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006 – My Audit findings	56
Chapter 6 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006 – My Office and the work we do	62
Chapter 7 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007 – The coming year	70
Chapter 8 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006 – My Annual Accounts	75
9 Glossary	100

Appendices

	Page Number
Appendix 1 The role and powers of the Commissioner	102
Appendix 2 The OLSCC – Our vision and values	104
Appendix 3 The Commissioner’s targets for 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006	105
Appendix 4 Key Performance Indicators to support the targets for 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006	106
Appendix 5 Summary of Law Society’s performance during 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006	108
Appendix 6 The Law Society’s initiatives during 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006	110
Appendix 7 Advisory Board members	113
Appendix 8 Legal Services Consumer Board members	114
Appendix 9 The Commissioner’s targets and recommendations for 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007	116
Appendix 10 Key Performance Indicators for 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007	119
Appendix 11 Office of the Legal Services Complaints Commissioner	122

Commissioner's Foreword



Zahida P. Manzoor

Zahida Manzoor CBE
Legal Services Complaints Commissioner

When I accepted the post of Legal Services Complaints Commissioner, I knew it was going to be a challenge to improve the complaints handling arm of the Law Society and turn back years of poor performance.

In this Annual Report I have summarised the improvements which have been made since my appointment. I am pleased that I can report that the Law Society's complaints handling organisation is, in parts, a more efficient and better performing operation since I was appointed. It has performed better than last year on its speed in dealing with some newer cases and on the quality of some of its decisions.

However, and despite these improvements, the Law Society has only met three out of its seven complaints handling targets for the period 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006. These were targets that were included in the Law Society's improvement Plan for the same period. In the context of the low starting point for the Law Society's complaints handling performance, this is disappointing.

For me, the targets I set and the plan I required from the Law Society go hand in hand and are both important. The targets indicate the level of performance required and the plan should state how that level of performance would be achieved.

After lengthy consideration about the Law Society's efforts to implement the work outlined in this improvement Plan, I wrote to the Law Society on 26 May 2006 to let it know that I was minded to declare that it had failed to handle complaints in accordance with its Plan. At this point

I also offered the Law Society the opportunity to make representations to me before making my final decision. At the time of writing this report the Law Society has provided me with its written and oral representations, on 13 and 15 June 2006 respectively, and I am considering these before making my final decision. If my final decision is that the Law Society did not handle complaints in accordance with its improvement Plan, I shall have to consider whether to levy a penalty, and if so, in what sum.

This Annual Report sets out, amongst other things, the areas where I feel that progress has been made, and where I believe the Law Society could have taken more action to implement its improvement Plan and achieve its targets.

The Law Society did exceed three of its timeliness targets. This is good news. But, what is disappointing for me with relation to those targets that were missed is that it means some people are still having to wait too long to have their complaint dealt with. Some consumers are still receiving poor customer service, and there is a lack of consistency in the way in which some cases are being managed. Too often organisations forget the impact of their failures on consumers, even if they acknowledge missing targets. The experience of consumers is what matters. I want to see actions not words over the coming twelve months.

My challenge over the next twelve months will be to work with the Law Society to try and make up any lost ground and to build on those improvements which it has made this year. I will want to see greater effort in order to ensure that the users of its services, consumers and practitioners alike, can start to benefit.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of my team for their hard work and commitment, and my Advisory Board and Legal Services Consumer Board for their support. I very much look forward to continuing to work with them and to ensuring the perspective they add to my work benefits both the consumer and legal practitioners.

This is an exciting time for those who are keen to see how the Government's reform of legal services will be implemented in practice. My hope is that the new organisations, which the Government plans to set up, will deliver real and sustainable improvements for the users of legal services, and for practitioners, the majority of whom already provide excellent services. I am working to actively share the experience I have as the Legal Services Complaints Commissioner and Legal Services Ombudsman to inform these developments, to help ensure that changes are made for the good of all. This is a challenging time, for my own organisation and for others, but I am confident that we can rise to the challenge and deliver.