



Zahida Manzoor CBE
Commissioner

PRESS NOTICE

11 JULY 2006

ACTIONS NOT WORDS – CONSUMERS MATTER

Today the Legal Services Complaints Commissioner, Zahida Manzoor CBE, releases her second Annual Report, 'Actions Not Words - Consumers Matter', covering the Law Society's performance for the period 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006.

The Commissioner said:

“My aim as Legal Services Complaints Commissioner is to ensure that the Law Society handles complaints about its members effectively and efficiently. People often access legal services when they are at their most vulnerable. It is essential, therefore, that there is a suitable complaints handling system in place with appropriate redress for when things go wrong.”

Speaking about the Law Society's performance, the Commissioner said:

“With the help of my Office there have been some improvements within the Law Society's handling of complaints over the period 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006, compared with performance during the previous year. The Law Society's complaints handling organisation is, in parts, a more efficient and better performing operation since I was appointed. Consumers now have a better chance of having their case dealt with more quickly and with better quality underpinning the service.

“However, and despite these improvements, there is still much to do to ensure that the users of its services, consumers and practitioners alike, can start to see benefits in all areas. The Law Society missed 4 of its 7 targets for last year and I want to see actions, not just words, over the next 12 months to make up this lost ground.”

The Commissioner also holds the Office of the Legal Services Ombudsman for England and Wales, and the Annual Report for that Office is also being published today.

• 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

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. Ms Manzoor CBE was appointed Legal Services Complaints 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 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. The Commissioner's second Annual Report, 'Actions not words – consumers matter', was released on 11 July 2006. The Report covers:
 - the Commissioner's provisional decision on the Law Society's performance against its Plan for the period 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006;
 - the Commissioner's decision on the inadequacy of the Law Society's Plan for the period 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007; and
 - the Commissioner's decision to levy a quarter of a million pounds on the Law Society for its inadequate Plan for the period 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007.
5. For enquiries please contact Catherine Jones, tel: 0113 2615436.

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