



Zahida Manzoor CBE
Commissioner

PRESS NOTICE

9 JULY 2008

**LEGAL SERVICES COMPLAINTS COMMISSIONER
2007/08 ANNUAL REPORT – “A WORK IN PROGRESS” - PUBLISHED**

The Legal Services Complaints Commissioner, Zahida Manzoor CBE, today (9 July 2008) released her fourth Annual Report, ‘A Work In Progress’, covering the period 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008.

The Commissioner said:

“2007/08 was a momentous year for legal services with the Royal Assent of the Legal Services Act. This Act will change legal complaints handling for the better with the expected opening of the new and independent Office for Legal Complaints (OLC) in late 2010.”

In the year 2007/08, the Law Society’s Legal Complaints Service (LCS) and the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) closed 18,534 complaints with a complaints handling budget of over £35 million.

Speaking about the LCS and SRA performance in complaints handling, the Commissioner said:

“In general, there was a mixed performance against the Plan last year. LCS and SRA met six of the 13 targets I set, exceeded two and missed five. Their overall performance is now at a level that provides a platform for moving forward and addressing core issues in 2008/09. As a result, late last month, I announced that despite the Law Society missing five targets and its failure to act in accordance with its 2007/08 Complaints Handling Plan that I will not impose a penalty.”

Zahida Manzoor reflected:

“It was disappointing to receive from the Law Society an inadequate Complaints Handling Plan for 2008/09. The extent of the inadequacy of the Plan determined the recent imposition of a £275,000 penalty. I am confident - with effort and commitment – LCS can and should achieve a higher performance than it was willing to sign up to in the Plan it submitted. Minimising the amount of legacy work the OLC could inherit from the LCS is now one of the key priorities for me.”

Looking forward to the future of legal complaint handling, Zahida Manzoor added:

“I look forward to a new complaints office which is effective, efficient and transparent - meeting the needs of both consumers and legal practitioners - and is fit for purpose for the twenty first century.”

(Ends)

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. The 2007/08 Annual Report can be downloaded on the OLSCC website www.olscc.gov.uk
2. 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.
3. The Commissioner is also the Legal Services Ombudsman (LSO) for England and Wales. The Annual Report for that Office was published on 1 July 2008. 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.
4. 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.
5. The design of this year's report reflects the fact that improving legal complaints handling is still a work in progress and is not a finished project. The report has been designed to enable the reader to quickly identify key issues in the 2007/08 reporting year.
6. For enquiries please contact Fleur Strong, tel: 0113 2615453.