

LAW SOCIETY COMPLAINTS HANDLING PLAN FROM 1 APRIL 2007 TO 31 MARCH 2008

Following my letter of 21 March and the further discussions held between our Offices I was pleased to receive on 4 April the Law Society's Final Plan (version 3.1) for complaints handling for the period 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008. I appreciate the effort and cooperation shown by the Law Society when working with my Office during the development of the Plan. I believe the collaborative approach adopted this year has been fundamental to producing a complaints handling Plan for 2007/8 which not only focuses on improving processes and procedures but more importantly wider business improvements. Having considered carefully the content of this Plan I am able to confirm that I consider it to be adequate in accordance with the Access to Justice Act 1999. In coming to my decision, I have set out below how the Law Society has responded to the points raised in my letter in which I agreed to postpone my formal decision until a plan could be submitted to me with all my points addressed. The key concerns I had and which the Law Society has attempted to address in the Plan submitted related to the following:

- In some of the target areas, mainly quality, there was insufficient evidence to suggest that the targets could be met. I am grateful for the additional written evidence and assurance provided by the Law Society and for the commitment expressed by both Chief Executives of the Legal Complaints Service (LCS) and Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) to achieving improvement.
- I believed that it would have been a missed opportunity for the key deliverables from the LCS and SRA Improvement Agendas not to be included in the Plan, particularly when in my view they are critical to delivering the wider business improvements necessary to develop an effective and efficient complaints handling scheme. Since I was appointed in 2004, this is something I have been driving for. I therefore welcome the Law Society's decision to act on my concerns and include the detail and timescales for year 1 improvement deliverables in its Plan. This is the first year I can recall where the Law Society has committed to delivering wider business improvements which better serve the needs of all its users and I look forward during the Plan year to seeing the potential benefits being realised for the consumer, profession and the Law Society.
- For some time now I have found it increasingly disappointing that many of the Change Improvement Projects (CHIPs) proposed for implementation have been poorly scoped with insufficient emphasis on the benefits to be realised. Having clearer and more measurable deliverables in relation to the Improvement Agenda and associated CHIPs is a good starting point. However, the Law Society needs now to get right its project and programme management and assurance functions if it is to succeed. Over the past two years I have seen slow progress in this area. I am aware of the recent review that LCS has undertaken and I have noted the findings from this. I now expect to see early action to address these findings and

the related recommendations I have made. This will help improve the delivery of change across both LCS and SRA.

I also want to take this opportunity to stress to the Law Society the importance of it being proactive in managing performance against the targets and delivery of its Plan earlier in the year. The last two years have seen a reactive approach resulting in effort being made during the latter part of the year once there has been realisation that some targets are unlikely to be met. This approach has been unsatisfactory and would not be acceptable for a further year.

My aim, and the timetable I had originally proposed was directed at achieving an agreed Plan by the end of March 2007. I am sure you will agree that the additional time taken to get the content right will be to the benefit of all, particularly the consumer and profession now that we also have wider business improvements included in the Plan. I believe that this broader range and level of improvement is necessary if the Law Society is to move closer to being recognised as an effective and efficient complaints handler.

My Office and I look forward to working closely with you and other staff at the Law Society over the coming plan year.