

**The Legal Services
Complaints Commissioner's
summary of the
Law Society's progress against its
Client Care Programme**

**Summary of progress and
activity as at June 2009**

THE LAW SOCIETY'S CLIENT CARE PROGRAMME

Background

In June 2008 the Legal Services Complaints Commissioner announced that she would be imposing a penalty of £275,000 on the Law Society following her decision to declare the complaints handling plan submitted by the Law Society for the period 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009 as inadequate.

On 4 March 2009, following a number of detailed discussions with both the Law Society and the Ministry of Justice, the Commissioner and the Law Society announced that they had reached a regulatory settlement whereby the monies will now be devoted to a range of Client Care measures costing £275,000, designed to promote diversity and excellence in the profession and to improve standards of client care and complaints handling.

Agreed measures

The measures agreed by the Commissioner and the Law Society include:

- **Project 1** - the Law Society committing £100,000 to establish a Consultancy Service, which will involve the recruitment and training of over 20 consultants nationally. These consultants will work with around 200 firms identified as needing support and information on best practice in client care and complaints handling, and will evaluate and monitor firms' progress as they implement the necessary changes.
- **Project 2** - the Law Society will also launch a dedicated client care and complaints handling helpline, which will involve taking over the Legal Complaints Service (LCS) telephone helpline for solicitors (Lawyerline) and relocating it to its own Helpline team, staffed by solicitors. The Law Society has committed £30,000 to recruit additional resource, train the existing team and launch the new complaints helpline.
- **Project 3** - the Law Society will provide additional funding to the Solicitors' Diversity Access Scheme. With the support of the Law Society Charity, the Solicitors' Diversity Access Scheme is able to award scholarships to a number of students to enable them to undertake courses leading to qualification as a solicitor. The Law Society will make an additional £105,000 to fund two additional places per year for five years on its Diversity Access Scheme.
- Recruiting a Client Care Project Manager at a cost of £40,000, who will be responsible for overseeing the range of measures agreed, providing project plans and reporting to the Commissioner on a quarterly basis on progress and expenditure under each programme of agreed measures.

The Commissioner's summary of progress and activity as at June 2009

The Law Society has provided the following update to the Commissioner giving details of the activity it has undertaken against each project during Quarter 2 (April - June 2009).

Project 1 – Client Care Consultancy Service

The Law Society has reported to the Commissioner that:

- a comprehensive consultancy package has been designed with the aid of client care experts. Pack consists of a self assessment questionnaire for the firms and an extensive toolkit of materials covering a range of client care and complaint handling competencies.
- Pack will be shared with all firms visited. This will enable firms to build on the visit by making more detailed use of the training as well as allowing the firms to train staff internally on the materials.
- Consultancy package has been fully accredited by the Solicitors Regulation Authority for Continuing Professional Development purposes (CPD). This means that solicitors trained as part of a visit will be able to accrue point towards their annual CPD requirements.
- 27 consultants based regionally across England and Wales have been recruited. All consultants have expertise in law management and / or complaints handling. All consultants are qualified solicitors. All consultants have attended a training day.
- Number of firms to be approached with the offer of a visit is 200. Of these firms 100 have now received an initial invitation to take up the offer of consultancy services. 8 firms, so far, have expressed an interest in taking up the offer.
- 1 firm has already received a visit from a consultant. Pilot visit took place in June. Feedback obtained as a result of the visit will assist in developing and fine tuning the process. The firm has also fed back on the visit.
- The other 7 firms who have already expressed an interest in a visit are currently processing their self assessment diagnostic questionnaire or are now awaiting a scheduled visit from a consultant.
- Law Society Regional Managers have been asked to promote the consultancy service to any firms in their region that are within the scope of the project and with which they have working relationship. It is hoped that this approach will lead to a greater take up of the service by firms over the coming weeks.

Expenditure during Quarter 2

Further costs of preparation of tool kit	£2,000
Costs of training day	£2,275

	£4,275

Project 2 - Client care and complaints handling helpline

The Law Society has reported to the Commissioner that:

- Lawyerline has received a considerable 246% increase on a month on month basis in calls during the first quarter of operation under the Law Society, compared with the Legal Complaints service (LCS). Call statistics are set out below.

Monthly calls to Lawyerline	
Law Society	Legal Complaints Service
April 2009 – 166	Aug 2008 – 40
May 2009 – 195	Sept 2008 – 63
June 2009 - 220	Oct 2008 – 63
	Nov 2008 – 61
	Dec 2008 – 50
	Jan 2009 – 57
Monthly average - 194	Monthly average - 56

- A dedicated email address has been offered for the first time during this quarter which has received and responded to 18 email enquiries.
- Since May 2009 a solicitor with subject matter expertise has been employed to handle calls on Lawyerline on a full time basis. This person is supported by other solicitor staff members who have been trained to handle Lawyerline calls.
- Statistics show that there has been a steady monthly increase in calls to Lawyerline during this first quarter. The Law Society's marketing and awareness campaign of Lawyerline has to date, comprised of:
 - 1) **Direct mail-out:** A prominent awareness piece appeared in the Law Society's electronic newsletter, Professional Update, which was sent to over 90,000 solicitors in May 2009.
 - 2) **Internet promotion:** The contact details form Lawyerline appeared as the top story on the homepage of the Law Society's website for the week from 21 - 28 May 2009.
 - 3) **Brochures:** On 29 May 2009 over 150 leaflets containing information about Lawyerline were sent to the Law Society's Regional Managers to distribute locally to solicitors.
 - 4) **Website:** A dedicated Lawyerline website was launched on 15 June 2009. The website contains detailed information about the Lawyerline service and client care matters and provides links to practice notes published by the Law Society on Client Care and Complaints Management.

Expenditure during Quarter 2

Lawyerline costs - £7,111

Project 3 - Diversity Access Scheme

The Law Society has reported that:

- 96 applications to the Diversity Access Scheme have been received this year. 22 applicants have been short listed for interview at the Law Society. The selection panel met on the 6 and 7 July 2009.
- It launched a flagship diversity initiative for the profession on 8 July to which Diversity Partners and practitioners of many large and small law firms came, as well as large purchasers of legal services and key stakeholders. Law Society used the occasion to highlight the Diversity Access Scheme and invited alumni from 2007 and 2008 to attend and network with the other guests.

Expenditure during Quarter 2

None.

Recruiting a Client Care Project Manager

The Law Society has reported to the Commissioner that a full time Client Care Manager has been seconded into the role to manage delivery of the programme.

Expenditure during Quarter 2

Costs £12,937

Cumulative costs summary for the Client Care Programme – January to June 2009

Consultancy Services	£8,275
Client Care Helpline	£7,111
Diversity Access Scheme	£0
Client Care Manager	<u>£12,937</u>
Total expenditure to January to June 2009	£28,323